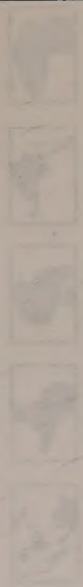

**THE
THIRD
WORLD**

**SOUTH
ASIA**

James H.K. Norton

**THE
THIRD
WORLD**

SOUTH ASIA



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THIRD
WORLD**

**SOUTH
ASIA**

James H.K. Norton

The Dushkin Publishing Group, Inc.
Guilford, Connecticut 06437

WITHDRAWN

Fresno Pacific College - M. B. Seminary
Fresno, Calif. 93702

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 84-92907

Manufactured in the United States of America.

First Printing

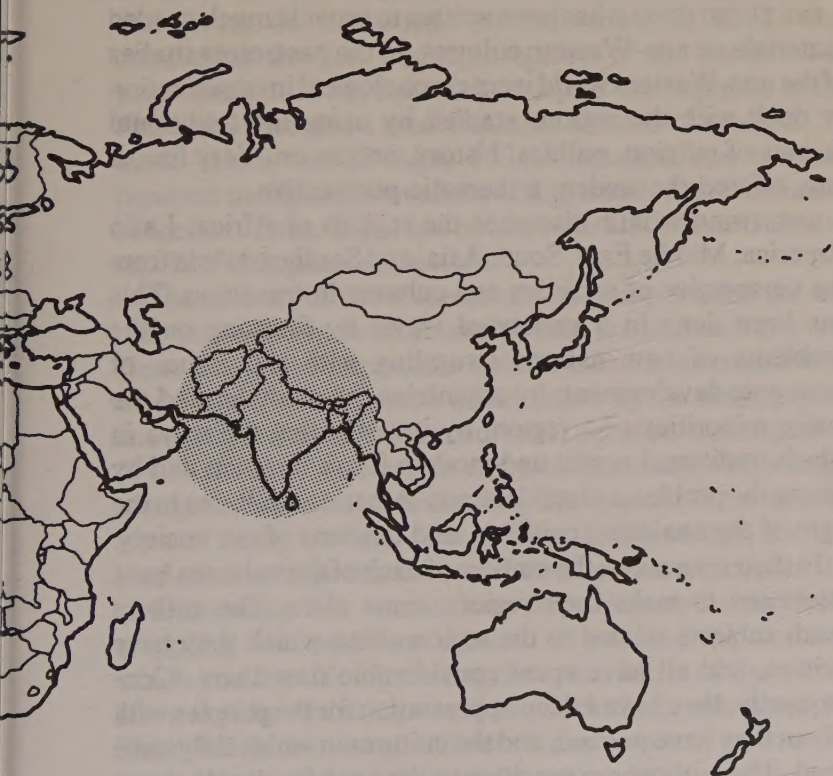
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SOUTH ASIA



THE THIRD WORLD



FOREWORD

THE THIRD WORLD has been written to provide much needed materials on non-Western cultures. In the past, most studies of the non-Western world were chronological in organization or dealt with the regions studied by using the traditional themes of religion, politics, history, and so on. Very few, if any, offered the student a thematic perspective.

THE THIRD WORLD discusses the regions of Africa, Latin America, Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia from the perspective of societies and cultures in transition. This has been done in a variety of ways: by focusing on the problems of new nations struggling with the issues of economic development; by organizing the study around the major minorities of a region; by investigating the ways in which traditional norms and modern forms interact; and by seeing the problems of modern non-American cultures in the light of the anxieties, conflicts, and tensions of our society.

In their own ways, the authors of each of the volumes have attempted to make their regions come alive. The authors teach subjects related to the region about which they have written, and all have spent considerable time there. Consequently, they have a deep appreciation for the peoples with whom they have worked, and the cultures in which they have lived. The authors are sensitive to the need for developing a knowledge of their areas which are intelligible to young Americans, but which, at the same time, are region-centric rather than Euro- or America-centric. The significance of such a perspective is illustrated by two plaques on a nineteenth century Spanish monument on the island of Mactan in the

Philippines glorifying God, Spain, the Queen Regent then in power, and Ferdinand Magellan. In 1941 a historical marker titled, "Ferdinand Magellan's Death" was anchored into the monument stating, "On this spot Ferdinand Magellan died on April 27, 1521, wounded in an encounter with the soldiers of Lapulapu, Chief of Mactan island. One of Magellan's ships, the Victoria, under the command of Juan Sebastian Elcano, sailed from Cebu on May 1, 1521, and anchored at San Lucar de Barrameda on September 6, 1522, thus completing the first circumnavigation of the earth." Ten years later, in 1951, the newly independent Republic of the Philippines erected a second marker entitled "Lapulapu." It read, "Here, on 27 April 1521, Lapulapu and his men repulsed the Spanish invaders, killing their leader Ferdinand Magellan. Thus, Lapulapu became the first Filipino to have repelled European aggression."

The authors of the volumes of *THE THIRD WORLD* are not only interested in these countries from an academic point of view. They also hope to be able to make a contribution to world understanding and world peace by increasing your knowledge of non-Western cultures, peoples, and societies.

THE THIRD WORLD has, in short, been written with a sense of urgency and a sense of mission. The urgency is the chaotic state of today's world. The mission is knowledge, not the kind of knowledge that comes from memorizing facts, but the understanding that comes from dispelling myths and from grappling with problems relevant to you and the world in which you live. You have a stake in the future of the world. It's a rapidly shrinking world in which the problems of the Third World are your problems. It's up to you to try to solve them. We hope that *THE THIRD WORLD* will be of some help along the way.

—Donald K. Swearer
Editorial Advisor
Third World Series
Swathmore College

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Norton received a B.S. degree from Yale University; B.A. and M.A. degrees in Sanskrit from Oxford University; and a Ph.D. in Indian philosophy from the University of Madras in India. He taught for ten years at the College of Wooster, where he was associate professor of religion and chairman of the Department of Indian Studies. While at Wooster he initiated a junior year study program for college students in Madurai University, India, sponsored by the Great Lakes Colleges Association. He has also taught in Madurai University, Boston University, and Oberlin College. He is currently farming in Massachusetts, conducting continuing education courses, and serving on the school committee for Martha's Vineyard.

Mr. Norton has spent five years in India as a Ford Foundation scholar, while doing graduate work at the University of Madras both as a teacher and as a Senior Research Fellow of the American Institute of Indian Studies. He is a member of the American Academy of Religion, the Association for Asian Studies, the Conference on Religion in South India, and has served on the executive committee of the Society for South Indian Studies. His articles on Indian philosophy and on comparisons of Eastern and Western thought appear in a number of books and journals.

INTRODUCTION

Any description of South Asia recalls the ancient Indian adage of four blind men attempting to describe an elephant to each other according to the different features of the animal which each is touching. The one who holds the elephant by its trunk is obviously presenting a different image from the one who is holding it by its tail. Because of the area's extent in both space and time as well as its immense diversity, the description of South Asia which follows is acknowledged to be highly selective, and to that degree partial.

Primary emphasis is given to the Great Central Plains region of the subcontinent in the account of both the development of Indian civilization and the present states of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Within this region—which does not include Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and encompasses only a small portion of Nepal—the main focus is on India and Hindu culture—simply because they are predominant in South Asia.

Sixty-four percent of the land and seventy-five percent of the people of the subcontinent belong to the Republic of India. Eighty-four percent of the people of India belong to one of the many sects of Hinduism. The other regions and nations of the subcontinent deserve more attention than is given here. It is my hope that this outline of the characteristics of the dominant nation and culture will give a clear picture of all of South Asia as real, vital, and worthy of further study.

This book has grown out of my experience as a student at the University of Madras and with students who took part in the Great Lakes Colleges Association Program for India Studies in Madurai University. My perceptions of South

Asia have been enlarged immeasurably by my fellow students. Many of their contributions will be recognized by them and, hopefully, accepted as an expression of my indebtedness and gratitude to them.

I am also grateful to the Universities of Madras and Madurai and Deccan College, Poona, for the welcome which they gave to us and for the rich resources which they have provided. Many members of their faculties have contributed to our understanding, and I thank them all for their instruction, their patience, and their friendship.

Special mention is due to four of my teachers whose impact is reflected in the pages which follow in many important and subtle ways. Professor Norvin Hein, of the Yale Divinity School, introduced me to the study of India and has been a continuing source of support and encouragement ever since. His sustaining interest is evident in the many suggestions and corrections which have been incorporated into this text. Professor T.M.P. Mahadevan, Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies in Philosophy, University of Madras, directed my doctoral studies, and has deeply enriched my understanding of the classical heritage of India. Professor T.K. Venkatesvaran, then of the Department of Sanskrit, Presidency College, Madras, (now Department of Religion, Detroit University, Detroit, Michigan), was my unfailing guide and friend during my student days in Madras. And Professor M. Shanmugam Pillai, Professor of Tamil, Madurai University, was the first director of the Great Lakes Colleges Association Centre in Madurai University, now part of the University of Wisconsin College Year in India Program. What this study portrays of the hidden depths and beauty of South Asia does so because it has been shared with me by these insightful and profoundly generous people.

Special thanks in the preparation of this edition of *South Asia* are due to Anand Gnanadesikan and Professor William Peterson, Southampton College.

AN OVERVIEW

What are we to make of South Asia? We have many different impressions of this distant part of the world. It is poor and overpopulated, burdened with more than its share of disease, floods, and famines. It is also a land of ancient traditions, exotic and holy. It is like an elephant, large and cumbersome. And like the elephant, South Asia has dignity, grace, and a quiet disposition. It also has a will of its own that must be respected.

To most of us in the United States South Asia seems very far away. Because it is not vital to our own interests, we see it as politically insignificant and an economic drain. How, then, does one become closer to South Asia?

First, let me suggest three things that we can learn from this remote subcontinent:

1) South Asia gives testimony to the grim presence of poverty in our world; we cannot pretend that it does not exist. In our affluent nation, we find such poverty distressing and hard to deal with. Yet to recognize our reaction to South Asia for being what it is today—overpopulated, inefficient, and poor—is itself an important lesson.

2) That part of the cultural heritage of South Asia which we call the Indian classical tradition contends that symbols are more real than facts, that what something represents is more important than what it is. The difference between a fact and a symbol is another lesson that South Asia can teach us.

3) The movements toward political independence in South Asia during the twentieth century have created several new experiments with democracy, including the founding of

India, the largest democratic nation in the world. These independence movements have also offered an alternative to the balance-of-power politics which dominated European international relations in the past, and which dominate East-West relations today. Non-violent civil disobedience as a political force has been practiced by Ghaffar Khan in Afghanistan; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the United States; and the Solidarity Movement in Poland. Mahatma Gandhi developed this method of non-violent resistance called *satyagraha* and it became the instrument by which India won its independence from British colonial rule in 1947. More significantly, by practicing non-violence India won its identity as a nation and its self-respect as a people.

These three ideas all reflect on how we look at the world around us and how our perceptions can be expanded. To recognize poverty in our town or on our block is one thing. To see it in the context of the peoples of South Asia—where the average annual per capita income in some parts of the subcontinent is about one-hundredth of what it is in the United States—helps us to recognize the contrast between affluence and poverty in our world in a very different way. In the United States our average annual per capita income (our Gross National Product divided by our population) is \$11,360. In Bangladesh people are surviving on an average income equivalent to \$120 per year, or less than thirty-five cents a day.¹

South Asia also teaches us different ways of knowing. We believe it is important to get the facts straight, but in the classical Indian context, it is more important to discover what our factual experiences tell us about the quality and the deeper meaning of our lives. Yoga, for example, is popularly known in the West as a highly disciplined set of exercises used to identify and control certain muscles in our bodies. More advanced forms of yoga do the same for breathing, the nervous system, and the mind. Practicing yoga is a way of discovering all of these different aspects of our bodies and of

making us attuned to our physical selves. That is what we experience.

But from the point of view of the yogi, the one who practices yoga, this “attuning” is symbolic. Yoga both points to and realizes the integration of the total self: spiritual as well as physical, unconscious as well as conscious. Yoga is then both a physical experience and something more. It is that “something more,” beyond yoga’s physical experience, which gives greater integrity and more meaning to the lives of those who practice it.

To know something as a fact—that India is a democracy or that you exist, for example—is, from the point of view of the Indian classical tradition, only the beginning of understanding. This tradition encourages us to explore beyond the obvious in our lives by discovering the symbolic meaning of what we know to be facts.

In this day, when the nuclear arms race threatens to destroy us at the same time our leaders claim it will protect us, we need to explore alternatives to the balance of military might in order to achieve political stability among nations. Satyagraha, the method of non-violent resistance which Gandhi developed first in South Africa and then in India during the first half of this century, does present an alternative. His use of it brought an end to British colonial rule, not by force of might but by creating a national identity which the British were no longer able to govern.

These lessons from South Asia expand our own horizons. They are really teaching us about ourselves. Encounters with peoples and perspectives from other lands and cultural backgrounds help us to grow into the fullness of our lives, to discover and experience.

One of my favorite billboard posters, displayed in front of one of our town churches, reads: “Life Is Hard—Compared with What?” Our understanding of the experiences and attitudes of other peoples whose language, culture, and traditions are different from our own can become the basis

for such a comparison. We may not discover that life is hard, but we will surely discover that life is far more diverse and interesting than we could ever have imagined from our experience with our culture alone.

Other things we can learn about South Asia tell us primarily about what makes that particular part of the world so unique. Most of this book will be devoted to those things, presented in the context of the more immediate concern: What can South Asia teach us about ourselves?

In the opening chapters, we will explore what sets this subcontinent apart as a place and as a civilization. In Chapter 2, we will discuss South Asia as a distinct geographical area. In Chapter 3, we will examine its people, their history and culture. In the remaining chapters, we will study South Asia in terms of a specific issue: The impact that modernization has had on the subcontinent.

We probably think of modernization in terms of high technology, electronic conveniences, jet-set living, and other products of modern science and an industrial economy. In this sense modernization is primarily an economic term, having to do with a people's standard of living. To be "modern" means to have sufficient wealth and incentive to develop such things as oil refineries, computers, and atomic energy in the search for technical solutions to human problems.

But modernization also has a political dimension. It has to do with how people are organized into sovereign units called "nations." This concept developed in Europe and was the basis for the creation of our own country in 1776. The United States was the first child of European political idealism: a secular, democratic nation.

The success of this concept in America, and subsequently in Europe, led to the nineteenth-century conviction that nationhood should be the standard for all peoples in the world. This belief was a major factor in the colonial expansion of European nations during the last century. Their

ideal was to prepare the rest of the world for democratic nationalism. During the twentieth century, this ideal has been realized. The globe is now a patchwork of sovereign nations.

The ideal of democratic nationhood also encompasses two other concepts. First, a modern democratic nation should expect a high degree of public participation. Self-determination, balanced with the protection of every citizen's civil rights, is the key to a democracy's success. Second, such participation should generate the energy and enthusiasm to raise the population's standard of living. During the nineteenth century, encouraged by the wealth generated by the industrial revolution and the availability of natural resources from their colonies, Western powers viewed prosperity as a natural consequence of democratic nationalism.

Another aspect of Western national idealism was not so clearly understood by its nineteenth-century proponents: If self-determination is an element of nationalism, then the people who are forming a modern political state must find their own ways of organizing themselves, ways which affirm their own identity as a separate people. This involves a process of self-discovery called "indigenization," which involves finding a political identity that is both appropriate and authentic to those who are forming a nation. When the people involved are from diverse backgrounds, it is not an easy task to find an appropriate base for their unity. Yet, the Western colonial powers were so eager to establish modern nations throughout the world that they assumed nationhood would provide its own unity. They imposed on others those political forms and structures which seemed best or most advantageous to the colonial powers themselves. They drew the boundaries of nations with what today appears quite arbitrary, if well-intentioned, abandon.

This colonial presumption overlooked the necessity of self-determination as an essential part of becoming a modern democratic nation. It undervalued the difficult process of

self-discovery needed to form a common national identity and to achieve political stability among diverse groups of people. This colonial presumption has not died easily. Some of the strongest advocates for national independence and democracy in our world are still impatient that the peoples of the Third World have not become Western, industrialized societies fast enough—that they do not look and act like us.

As in other parts of the Third World, indigenization is evident in each South Asian nation's struggle to become modern. We will look at this process primarily in India, the largest nation of the subcontinent. We will briefly contrast its experience with that of two other nations in the subcontinent, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Chapter 4 will look at the struggles of these three countries to achieve the stable, constitutional governments which make them modern democratic nations.

The process of modernization is evident on the national level, as these countries experiment with constitutional forms and economic plans. But the impact of modernization is also felt on the local level. Because eighty percent of the people of South Asia live in villages, they experience their primary sense of political and social identity there. The shape of modernization on the subcontinent is also being determined there. Chapter 5 will introduce the village as an indigenous geographic and social unit. Changes that are taking place on this level are described in Chapter 6.

The kinds of changes that are taking place in the village reveal yet another important strand of South Asian life. Modernization interacts not only with the established patterns of the village's rural life-style but also with its ancient, classical tradition. Chapter 7 will describe religious practices in a village as a primary example of the adaptation of the classical tradition there. Chapter 8 will summarize some of the characteristics of the classical tradition which are evident in South Asian life today.

Indigenization must involve all of these three inter-related strands: the village, the classical tradition, and moderniza-

tion. In an important way, Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India's independence movement, did just that. He created a vision of India's independence as a nation which was true to all three elements. In the final chapter, we will look at this aspect of Gandhi's leadership to show he could be both profoundly traditional and authentically modern.



SOUTH ASIA: A PLACE

South Asia is clearly a distinct geographic area. Enclosed on the south by the Indian Ocean, it is set apart from the rest of Asia to the north by the Himalayan Mountains. This range has fifty peaks over twenty-four thousand feet high, including Mount Everest. At 29,028 feet, Mount Everest is the highest mountain in the world. This range forms an 800-mile wall along the north side of the subcontinent. Its passes are steep and difficult: Most of them are over fifteen thousand feet above sea level and snow-bound throughout the year.

The flanks of this mountain range to the west and east are also formidable. Adjoining mountains, called the Hindu Kush and the Kirthar Range, separate the subcontinent from Persia to the west. The Naga Hills and dense jungle separate the region from Burma to the east. Enclosed within these natural barriers is a land mass of about two million square miles, a little more than half the size of the United States.

This land mass was not originally a part of Asia. Geologists who have studied the interlocking plates which form the earth's surface—a science known as plate-tectonics—tell us that millions of years ago the land mass which we now call South Asia lay along the east coast of Africa. It gradually slid away toward the northeast, leaving a space into which Madagascar moved. Eventually this land mass jammed into the south side of Asia with such force that it created the Himalayan range. These mountains, already the highest in the world, are still rising as a result of that collision.

South Asia is divided in a number of ways. It contains four regions of different topography and climate, which range

from the arctic heights of the Himalayas to the tropical beaches of the Coastal Plains. Because three major religious traditions—Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic—are predominant in different parts of the subcontinent, it can also be divided according to religion. Four different language families are represented in the many distinct languages and dialects spoken in various parts of the subcontinent. And there are seven distinct nations which have jurisdiction over separate parts of this area.

All of these divisions—geographic, religious, linguistic and political—are significant. Although they bear some relation to one another, they do not coincide. In this chapter we will look at each of these divisions separately, developing an overlay of these four different groupings. In the next chapter, we will explore why these groups are overlaid in such different patterns.

GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS

The South Asian subcontinent has four distinct natural environments. The Himalayan region lies along its northern border. Directly to the south, and gradually sloping from the Himalayas toward the surrounding ocean, is the great Central Plain. The Deccan plateau extends south of the Central Plain onto the peninsula between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. The southern part of Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon), even though it is a separate island, is considered an extension of this region. The fourth region is the narrow Coastal Plain of both the peninsula and Sri Lanka along the enclosing ocean.

The Himalayan Region

The northernmost region lies on the south face of the Himalayas and on the foothills to the east and west. Because of the unrelenting arctic cold and the barren glaciers on the

steeply sloping ridges of these mountains, much of the region is uninhabitable.

Interspersed among the high peaks and the foothills are protected gorges and luxuriant valleys which sustain isolated groups of independent mountain peoples. The average density of the entire region is only seventy people per square mile.

Most of these people make their living by tending flocks of sheep, yak, and goats; practicing traditional crafts; or working on tea plantations and orchards. Traders and bearers carry heavy loads on their backs as they trek the mountain passes to the remote cities of Ladakh or over the divide into Tibet.

The extreme height and breathtaking beauty of this region can inspire an intense, religious awe. Numerous monasteries and temples, circled with prayer flags, dot the mountains, testifying to the unceasing reverence of those who live so close to the edge of the world.

The Great Central Plain

Three great river systems emerge from the Himalayan range, providing an uneven flow of life-sustaining water from the snow-capped mountains.

Five rivers flow out of the western end of the range into the Indus River Valley and then south into the Arabian Sea. The Jumna and the Ganges rivers flow south out of the central part of the mountain range into the Gangetic Plain and then toward the east, where they join at Allahabad. They continue across the entire subcontinent to enter the Bay of Bengal. The third river, the Bhramaputra, also originates in the Himalayas, within a hundred miles of the beginning of the Indus and Ganges river systems. It flows to the east behind the range and then turns south around the range's eastern end. There it joins the Ganges delta and also empties into the Bay of Bengal.

The broad plains which these rivers traverse contain 100 million acres of South Asia's most arable land. They are the most densely populated areas in the subcontinent.

The port cities on these rivers' deltas—Karachi, Calcutta, and Dacca—are the largest cities in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, respectively. New Delhi, the capital of India, sits on the Jumna River. Farther down on the Ganges are the ancient cities of Banaras and Patna, once known as Kasi and Pataliputra. There is evidence that the world's most ancient cities stood in the Indus River Valley as long ago as 2900 B.C.

Even though large urban centers have long dominated this region, over eighty percent of the people in the Central Plain live in small, rural villages with average populations of around one thousand inhabitants. The villages are closer together toward the Ganges and Bhramaputra delta, where well over two thousand people dwell per square mile.

Agriculture is the predominant occupation in this region. The villagers depend upon the monsoon rains and the uncertain yield of wheat and rice grown annually on the three great river plains for their subsistence.

The Deccan

Rising to the south of the Gangetic Plain, in peninsular India, is a wide plateau flanked by two mountain ranges. These ranges, called the Western and Eastern Ghats, though much smaller, are older than the Himalayan range. The Western Ghats, the larger of the two, extend from the rugged hills of Rajasthan in the north, eventually reaching a height of nine thousand feet toward the southern tip of India. Although less precipitous than the Himalayas, these mountains are also sparsely populated. They have long provided refuge for renegade princes, slopes for coffee and tea plantations, shelters for wild game, and homes for most of India's tribal population.

The annual rains brought by the south-west monsoon

during the summer months make the Western Ghats the source of the plateau's most important rivers: the Godavari, the Krishna, and the Kauvery. When filled with monsoon rain, all of them flow to the east, where they empty into the Bay of Bengal.

Several large and historic cities stand in this region. They include Hyderabad, Ahmadabad, and Bangalore: India's fifth, sixth, and seventh largest and most important industrial cities. But, as in the Central Plain, most of the people of the Deccan live in small, rural villages and are dependent upon agriculture for their subsistence.

Because of its geographic and linguistic separation, many of the customs and traditions of the Deccan are different from those of the Gangetic Plain to the north. Only during the times of great empires has this region shared a common political history with the more densely populated Central Plains region.

Sri Lanka is an island forty miles off the southeast coast of India, 270 miles long from north to south. It shares a similar topography with peninsular India because it was once a part of the same land mass. The central area of the south, known as the Kandyan Highlands, rises to a height of 6700 feet, and like the Western Ghats of South India, it is filled with rice paddies and tea plantations nourished by monsoon rains.

The Coastal Plain

Between the surrounding ocean waters and the mountainous rim of the Deccan plateau in India and the Kandyan Highlands in Sri Lanka is the fourth distinct geographic region of the South Asian subcontinent: the Coastal Plain. These narrow strips are tropical. During the rainy monsoon seasons they are filled with luxuriant growth, particularly along the southwest Malabar Coast of India and the south shore of Sri Lanka.

The port cities of Bombay and Madras, the second and

fourth largest in South Asia, and Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, are in this region. All three were built during the expansion of European commerce in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and they became modern urban centers under British colonial rule. But as in the rest of the subcontinent, the population of this region is mostly rural. Along the Malabar Coast, the village population's density is more than four thousand per square mile, the highest rural density in the subcontinent.

The vivid contrasts in altitudes, temperatures, rainfall, and densities of population in these four geographic regions explain some of the differences in language, culture, and religion among the many diverse peoples who live in South Asia. But because the dividing lines between these other groupings do not coincide with these geographic areas, the differences in environment alone do not account for these other important divisions of the subcontinent.

RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam—three major religions of the world—are predominant in specific parts of South Asia. Almost all of the Buddhists, for example, live on the periphery of the subcontinent. About seventy percent of the population of the island of Sri Lanka belong to the Theravada tradition of Buddhism. A large percent of those who live along the Tibetan border in the Himalayan region are also Buddhists, but they follow the Tibetan tradition of Mahayana Buddhism. Although Buddhism began in India, it has spread to lands beyond the subcontinent: the Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka to Southeast Asia and the Mahayana Buddhism of the Himalayas to East Asia.

Most of the Muslims, on the other hand, live along the three great rivers of the Central Plain and in the Himalayan region closest to the Middle East. These Muslims trace their heritage to Persia and Turkey, from which the religion came

to South Asia in the twelfth and sixteenth centuries A.D. Islam's advance across the subcontinent was partly by migration, but mostly by conversion of those who had previously been Buddhists. In fact, Buddhism is virtually absent from all but the periphery of the subcontinent today. The one exception is a large community of recent converts to Buddhism along the west side of the Deccan in the Indian state of Maharashtra.

Hinduism is the religion of over seventy percent of the total population of South Asia. It is the predominant religion in the Jumna-Gangetic portion of the Central Plain and throughout the Deccan Plateau and Coastal Plain of peninsular India. A majority of the population in the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal are Hindu. However, Hindus are significant minorities—about twenty percent of the total population—in Bangladesh on the Bhramaputra River delta and on the island of Sri Lanka.

Other religious communities such as Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, Jews, and Christians are also found on the subcontinent, but they constitute a very small percentage of the total population of South Asia. However, because they tend to congregate together, they are substantial minorities in specific areas.

The Sikhs represent only two percent of the total population of the Central Plain. But most of them live in that part of the Indus River Valley which is today the Indian State of Punjab. Because of this, they are a significant political force in that state.

The Jains total only half the number of Sikhs in the subcontinent. But they live predominantly in the Indian State of Gujarat, along the western coast of India, and they are an influential group in that part of the country.

Similarly, Christians comprise less than three percent of the total population of South Asia. But most of them live on the Malabar Coast, where they constitute about one-third of the population of the state of Kerala and a majority in Goa.

In these states Christians have become a major political force.

Because they are concentrated in these specific areas, it is important to identify these smaller religious communities by geographic region. Whether a Sikh or a Christian is living in the Punjab or on the Malabar Coast will make a difference in how each sees the relation of his religion to politics and society. But the boundaries between the major religious communities and geographic regions do not coincide, and factors other than the natural environment have determined where these religions are predominant. Religious identity thus divides the subcontinent into a pattern related to, but different from, that established by geography.

THE LANGUAGE FAMILIES

The many different languages spoken in South Asia present an even more intricate patchwork than do religion and geography. Its complexity is due in part to the sheer number of language families and distinct languages, each of which is used by tens of millions of people. Also confusing are the blurring of languages in the dialects spoken in the border areas of the linguistic regions and the presence of language minorities in each region. Generally, however, South Asia can be divided into specific areas where the majority of the people communicate in a distinct language.

Most of these languages belong to two major language families. Some fifteen of them are Indo-European and four Dravidian. There are also two minor language families, Tibetan and Tribal.

Indo-European languages are the most prevalent in the subcontinent. They are spoken primarily in the Central Plain, in the western and central parts of the Himalayan region, the northern portion of the Deccan plateau, and on Sri Lanka. The earliest Indo-European language was brought to South Asia by the Aryan invaders about 1700 B.C. These

people also migrated into Europe at the same time, taking with them the earliest forms of the European Romance and Germanic languages. This migration accounts for the relation of classical Greek and Latin to Sanskrit, the classical language of India.

One example of the relationship of these languages is the name "Jupiter," the supreme god of Roman mythology. His Greek equivalent was "Zeus," the father (*pater*) of the gods. *Jupiter* in Latin equals *Zeus Pater* in Greek. In Sanskrit the name appears as *Dyaus Pitri*, which gives us the original, literal meaning of the name in all three languages: "the father of the sky." Numerous other examples reveal not only the common meaning of words, but also the common forms and customs of the ancient Aryan people.

Hindi, Bengali, and Punjabi are the most widely-spoken of the Indo-European languages on the subcontinent today. They predominate in the area spreading across the Central Plain region from the center to the east and west. Because of the large number of other related languages—such as Marathi, Urdu, and Oriya—no one of these languages is understood by a majority of the people living in the Indo-European language area. (Although Hindi is the "official language of India, only thirty-eight percent of the population speaks it.) They are understood even less by those to the south, on the peninsula, and along the Himalayan border. There the languages which are commonly spoken belong to different language families.

The four languages spoken primarily on peninsular India belong to the language family called Dravidian. These Dravidian languages are different in origin, structure, and vocabulary from the Indo-European languages of North India; they are harder for someone from the north to understand than the languages of Europe. This language group does not exist outside of South Asia, except as spoken by recent migrants to East Africa and Southeast Asia.

The origin of these Dravidian languages is not known.

Evidence suggests that they have been spoken in South Asia for a long time, dating back to the Indus River city culture of the third millenium B.C. As a linguistic group today, Dravidian language speakers constitute about twenty per-cent of the population of the subcontinent.

One of the two smaller language family groups is found among those living along the Himalayan border to the north; these people speak languages which are based on Tibetan. Those tribal communities which have survived in remote parts of the subcontinent, especially in the Eastern and Western Ghats, speak languages which relate them to an even older linguistic family called Proto-Astroloid. This family includes languages spoken by remote aboriginal tribes in Australia.

A map which shows the distribution of these language families found in South Asia reveals a mixture of continuity and assimilation extending to many different parts of the world. The linguistic extension to Europe, Tibet, and Australia reveal a much greater movement of people in ancient times than the geographical barriers which isolate the subcontinent would suggest.

It is difficult to draw connections between the different languages and either the geographic regions of South Asia or the religious. There is an obvious correlation between the Tibetan-based languages, Tibetan Buddhism, and the Himalayan region—but any clear overlap of geography, language, and religion ends there.

The Dravidian family of languages is prevalent on a major portion of the Deccan Plateau and the Coastal Plain in India, as well as on the northern end of the Coastal Plain of Sri Lanka. The dividing line between the Dravidian and the Indo-European language areas does not coincide with any of the natural boundaries between these geographic regions. It crosses the peninsula of India somewhat to the south of the elevation which separates the Deccan plateau from the Gangetic Plain, and to the north of the foothills which



The seven major language families in South Asia (shown above) cross national, geographical, and religious borders.

separate the Kandyan highlands from the Coastal Plain in Sri Lanka.

The areas in which these languages are spoken do not coincide with the religious communities either. The Dravidian languages are spoken in predominantly Hindu areas. But the vast majority of Hindus, Muslims, and the Theravada Buddhists of Sri Lanka speak Indo-European languages.

There does seem to be a correlation between specific Indo-European languages and different religious communities. The language of the Theravada Buddhists is Sinhalese, an Indo-European language confined to Sri Lanka. The Muslims of South Asia speak primarily Urdu, Pushtu, Sindhi, Punjabi and Bengali—depending upon where in the subcontinent they live. Hindus also speak several Indo-European languages, such as Hindi, Oriya, Marathi, Punjabi, and Bengali. Which of these languages they speak depends upon the specific part of the subcontinent in which they live.

So far we have identified three different ways in which South Asia can be divided: by region, by religion, and by language. We have also discovered that each of these divisions, because they do not coincide, provides a different map of the subcontinent.

Unlike the natural regions, the divisions between the religions and languages have developed and been altered during recent millenia. Yet they still reflect the distinct cultural and historical traditions of the many different peoples of South Asia. Every individual's religion and language form a vital part of his or her social and self-identity. Because of such experiences as the Holocaust and the unrest in Northern Ireland, we can understand the significance of religious identity. We are not so aware of the significance of language. In South Asia language identity is very important. Among those who share a common regional language, or "mother tongue," there is a strong sense of community identity.

The Indian government's States Reorganization Act of

1956 reaffirmed the significance of language. This act used the different language areas as the basis for drawing the boundaries between the states of the nation. It put into practice Mahatma Gandhi's belief that for a South Asian the sense of political identity needed for democracy grows best among a community united by a common mother tongue.

THE NATIONS OF SOUTH ASIA

The fourth division, the political borders between the new nations of South Asia, offers yet another set of boundaries. Not one of these borders coincides with either the geographical or the linguistic regions. Political boundaries do sometimes overlap with the areas of religious predominance—although even here the religious and political divisions are not always the same.

There are seven separate countries in South Asia today. (An eighth country, Sikkim, was incorporated into India in 1975.) In order of size, they are:

	Area (sq. miles)	Percent of Total	Geographical Region
India	1,261,597	64.0	all four
Pakistan	310,403	16.0	Central Plain & Himalayan
Afghanistan	245,000	12.0	Himalayan
Bangladesh	55,126	2.8	Central Plain
Nepal	54,563	2.8	Himalayan
Sri Lanka	25,332	1.5	Central Plain Penninsula & Coastal Plain
Bhutan	18,000	.9	Himalayan

These seven nations are all relatively new, having emerged as independent countries through British colonial rule. Not all of them were under direct British imperial authority,

known as the British Raj. Two-fifths of India, for example, remained as princely states under the control of hereditary maharajas. But the presence of the Raj in the subcontinent during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a very significant factor in the development of these nations and was decisive in determining where most of the borders between countries have been established.

Only Sri Lanka, because it is an island off the coast of the subcontinent, has totally natural boundaries. All of the other nations' borders have been established on other grounds than geography.

Afghanistan, though never under British colonial rule, was established as an independent buffer region during the late nineteenth century by the imperial forces of czarist Russia, Persia, and Great Britain. The actual borders of the land under the authority of the Amir of Kabul, were established by a treaty between Russia and the British in 1907.

Within the borders of Afghanistan are a number of very independent ethnic groups, all with their own language and distinct customs. The largest three groups extend over the country's borders in three directions. The Pathans are the largest group, today comprising more than fifty percent of the nation's population. They are linguistically and ethnically the same as the majority of the people of the northwest frontier province of Pakistan. This common identity makes the border between these two countries somewhat unclear and fragile. Today the border has become fluid because of the influx of over two million Pathan refugees into Pakistan in response to the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Another twenty percent of the people of Afghanistan, those who speak Dari, share the same identity with the people of Iran to the southwest. Another ten percent, the Uzbek, belong to an ethnic group which lives on both sides of the border with Russia. Because there is no cohesion between these ethnic groups and each is pulled in a different direction, Afghanistan has long been subject to the influence,

and sometimes the intrusion, of its more powerful neighbors.

The small country of Bhutan, like Afghanistan, is landlocked in the Himalayan region, but it is more isolated and has far greater ethnic cohesion. Its ethnic and linguistic identity also extends across its border to the north, into Tibet. Most of Bhutan's population has migrated from Tibet. Even its origin as a country goes back some 300 years to when the Tibetan lama, Shepton LaPha, came to claim this land as his own. Because of this close relationship, Bhutan became the primary refuge for the Tibetans who fled their homeland following the Chinese takeover in 1959.

Nepal is also a Himalayan kingdom, but it is three times larger than Bhutan. Where the ethnic identity of the Bhutanese extends to the north, in Nepal it extends to the south. In fact its southern boundary extends into the Central Plain, where thirty percent of the Nepalese population lives. Like Bhutan, Nepal shows strong Tibetan influence along its northern border. The Sherpas, who are known internationally for their role as guides in the conquest of the Himalayan peaks, are Tibetan in origin. But in its central highlands and in the lowlands in the Gangetic Plain, Nepal relates to India.

This relationship was established 200 years ago by a Gurka prince from India who invaded this region and set up a Hindu kingdom in the Katmandu Valley. Shortly afterward, in 1814, the British defeated the Gurkha forces of Nepal and established the present boundaries of the country.

The present boundaries of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were also determined by the British Raj. In 1947, upon relinquishing its imperial hold on the subcontinent, the Raj divided the administrative districts of the Central Plains region which it controlled into either Muslim or Hindu sections. There were two Muslim majority sections, one on each side of the subcontinent. They became the new nation of Pakistan. In 1971, the eastern section of Pakistan broke away to become the country of Bangladesh.

Because of the different ways that all seven nations were

NATIONS OF SOUTH ASIA



Although they are ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse, the peoples of the seven countries of South Asia are struggling to find a common national identity.

related to the British Raj, their origins and the determination of their boundaries are quite unique. Each had its own set of challenges to meet in seeking its identity as a new nation. Not the least of their problems was the discrepancy between their national boundaries and the already existing differences between geography, religion, and language. A look at the religious and linguistic groupings in each nation reveals the magnitude of the problem. How could these nations create a common political identity when its peoples were so diverse?

	Predominant Religion	Exclusive Language	Language Shared
Afghanistan	Muslim (99%)	none	Pushtu (50%) Dari (20%) Uzbek (10%)
Bangladesh	Muslim (85%)	none	Bengali
Bhutan	Buddhist (75%)	none	Bhutanese (60%) Nepali (25%)
India	Hindu (83%)	Telugu (9%) Marathi (8%) Gujarati (5%) Kanarese (4%) Oriya (3%) Malayalam (3%) Kashmiri Assamese	Hindi (38%) Bengali (8%) Tamil (7%) Urdu (6%) Punjabi (3%)
Nepal	Hindu (87%)	none	Nepali (50%) Hindi (30%) Bhutanese
Pakistan	Muslim (97%)	Sindhi (11%)	Punjabi (65%) Urdu (9%) Pushtu
Sri Lanka	Buddhist (67%)	Sinhalese (71%)	Tamil (20%)

There is nothing in the United States to compare with the complex interrelation of these groupings by region, religion,

language, and nation. Yet it is important to understand the extensive pluralism in which the peoples of the subcontinent live and in which they are seeking a way to become modern nations.

The same complexity applies to the traditional social groupings in the subcontinent known as the “caste system.” Because this system functions *within* the natural, national, linguistic, and religious groupings already discussed, it introduces an even more intricate pattern into our description of South Asia. It is also a significant and useful way to understand South Asia as a distinct place. We will look at this system, or rather these systems, later on in Chapters 5 and 8.



SOUTH ASIA: A CIVILIZATION

Of the several divisions of South Asia examined in the last chapter, only the four geographic regions were created by nature. The other divisions were all developed by the people living in this environment. This development is what we call culture.

Some aspects of human culture are determined by natural surroundings: The climate and natural resources determine what we eat, wear, and build with. But—as we saw in the last chapter—language, religion, and political identity do not have a consistent relationship with the environment. They evolve among groups of people in response to causes other than the natural conditions in which they live. To discover the distinctive character of a culture we must look not only at its environment but at its evolution as a social group over an extended period of time. We then begin to understand a culture as a civilization.

The evolution of human culture on the South Asian subcontinent can be traced back for many thousands of years. As discussed in the last chapter, this civilization contains very diverse peoples who, as a result of many migrations and internal changes over the centuries, have developed different religious communities, speak different languages, and practice different customs. Only within this last century have they been divided into seven separate nations.

With such diversity, can we say that these people belong to

a single civilization? The answer is "yes," but only insofar as they share a common heritage.

The image of the "melting pot," which we use to describe the plurality of our own society, is inadequate to describe South Asian culture because that culture is so much more diverse than ours, and there is no common nation to unify the population. A more appropriate image of South Asian civilization is one of a collage of many-colored layers. These layers have been superimposed on each other at different times, and there have been cross-influences between them. They have changed and shaped each other. But each layer has continued to retain its own character.

One characteristic of South Asian civilization which makes the image of layers useful is the continuity within each layer. Certain things go on and on; they are never discarded, just added on to. An example of this continuity is a household object called the "saddle-quern." It is a flat grinding stone about eighteen inches long which is found today in most kitchens in South Asia. It is used to grind up the various spices which give such a hot flavor to Indian cooking. The saddle-quern is larger than what is needed to do this grinding today—suggesting an earlier origin and use. It was actually introduced into the South Asian home over six thousand years ago when the society first became agricultural rather than food-gathering. It was used then to grind the earliest harvests of grain into flour.

Other means of milling flour have long since replaced the original saddle-quern, but it has survived as a useful household object, adapted to many other tasks. In our society of planned obsolescence, it is hard to imagine living in a culture which has continued to find a use for the same household object for six thousand years.

Another example of this link with the earliest days of agriculture is the worship of the Mother Goddess, the creative force in nature, fertility and spontaneous organic growth. Her cult began when people first cultivated the soil

and reaped the earth's harvests. Figurines portraying this opulent female diety have survived for thousands of years. They are among humankind's earliest works of art.

The worship of the Mother Goddess has survived and found expression in various forms during many periods in the evolution of South Asian civilization. In the Vedic literature of the tenth century B.C., she was celebrated as the goddess Aditi, "the Boundless One," mother of the gods. From 0-300 A.D., she appears as Bhū Devi, "Mother Earth." Now she is frequently worshipped as the goddess of the village, who assures its stability as a home and its bounty as a source of food and water. She remains a powerful presence in popular religious life today: as Kali, Durga, Radha, and KENCHAMMA.

To give some idea of the extensive evolution of South Asian civilization, we will briefly sketch six consecutive periods in its history in order to define the origin and the distinctive character of some of its more important layers. Each of these six periods is limited geographically. None of them covered the subcontinent as a whole, and most of them occurred only in the Great Central Plain. Even so, they reveal the immense diversity of the separate layers, which form the culture that is South Asian civilization today.

THE HARAPPAN CITY CULTURE (3000 - 1700 B.C.)

Archeology has recovered many artifacts on the subcontinent, some of which may be over fifty thousand years old. Such objects as hand-chipped stone tools, pottery fragments, and copper implements offer us glimpses of a very ancient past. One of the most fascinating archeological discoveries took place in 1922, when the remains of an entire city along the ancient course of the Indus River, in what is now Pakistan, were unearthed. It became the first evidence of the Harappan City culture which flourished in the Indus River Valley from about 3000 to 1700 B.C.

Subsequent excavations revealed two large cities, Harappa and Mohenjo Daro, which were 350 miles apart and built according to the same urban plan. Also discovered were smaller, ancillary cities which extended the culture south along the western coast of India to the present state of Gujarat.

The origin of this ancient urban culture presents an intriguing puzzle. The cities seem to have just appeared, fully developed. Their broad main streets, large granaries, and intricate drainage systems reveal that they were built with a previous understanding of the needs of urban life. But where the cities' builders came from is not known.

At least three main features of the Harappan culture have become a part of the continuing evolution of South Asian civilization. First is the Harappans' understanding of hydrology. The accumulation of surplus water essential for the building of a city was collected through the construction of irrigation trenches which controlled the uneven torrents of the Indus River and turned the arid lands of the valley into productive agricultural fields. Out of these fields sufficient grain and cotton were harvested to feed and clothe the city dwellers, freeing them to pursue other skills. This ability to control water is also evident in the construction of a large water tank or bath on the citadel of each of the two main cities. The overflow from this tank was the source of a drainage system which provided sewerage removal for the entire city. The plumbing of Mohenjo Daro was more modern than that of nineteenth-century Europe.

Also impressive was the construction of a long bulkhead in the coastal city of Lothal which was built in such a way that it regulated the tidal and river waters so that ships were held at a constant level against it. This feat of hydraulic engineering made it possible to load and unload ships without regard to the level of the tide.

The Lothal bulkhead identifies another important feature of the Harappan culture: its commerce. Evidence of Indus

cotton and Harappan merchant seals found in Mesopotamia indicates there was extensive trade between these Indus River Valley cities and the developing civilizations along the Persian Gulf to the west. There is no evidence of any martial strength or overbearing public authority, suggesting that Harappan culture was primarily commercial. It was a civilization run by merchants.

Artifacts which have been recovered from the sites of these cities reveal the beginning of still-existing aesthetic and religious attitudes. Most important are the large collection of tiny seals which these Harappan merchants used both to identify and to protect their goods for transit to some foreign markets. Figures portrayed on these seals suggest a number of popular and yogic antecedents of later religious practice, particularly those associated with the Hindu god Shiva. The short fragments of writing on the seals have yet to be deciphered, so we do not understand what connection there was between this deity and the commercial life of the city. The seals also show a firm grasp of the bas-relief style which became standard in later classical sculpture, even on its more massive scale.

This city culture flourished with incredible consistency for a thousand years. Mohenjo Daro was rebuilt seven times during this period, each time according to the same plan as the one before it. It ended as suddenly as it began when the two large cities of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro were violently destroyed about 1700 B.C. It appeared that the cities might have gone on forever had they not been crushed by the advances of military technology and peoples from other parts of the world. Continuity, as a characteristic of South Asian civilization, was first in evidence in this very stable city culture.

THE ARYAN VEDIC CULTURE (1500 - 500 B.C.)

One of the most significant advances of people during the

second millenium B.C. was the Aryan migration. These people moved from the Caspian steppes west into the Mediterranean world and east into South Asia around 1500 B.C. They were a robust, cattle-herding people, tribal in social structure and highly mobile. They were especially skillful in handling a horse-drawn war chariot, which they used effectively to overrun the peoples in the path of their migrations. In the Indus River Valley they not only overran the Harappan cities, they also appear to have destroyed the irrigation ditches to release the waters that encumbered the way of their chariots and grazing herds.

Unlike the Harappan culture, there are no archeological artifacts to suggest distinctive qualities of the Aryan culture: Their life was too mobile. Their heritage has, rather, been preserved in their religious literature, the Vedas. Because it was sacred to the Aryans, the Vedas were carefully memorized. They have been handed down by oral recitation to this very day. The 1028 hymns of the *Rig Veda* contain many fragments and allusions to the time of the Aryan migration, about 1500 B.C. and possibly even earlier. This collection was probably compiled about 1000 B.C.

These hymns of the *Rig Veda* were used by the Aryan priests in sacrifices which they created to celebrate the royal authority of their rustic tribal princes. It was believed these rituals would only be effective if the verses were recited precisely. Numerous devices were invented to be sure that they were remembered correctly. Thus, although the verses were not written down for over two thousand years, we can be sure that what we have today is exactly what was compiled centuries ago.

As the Harappan seals are representative of the Indus River Valley culture, so the sacrifice is the primary symbol of Vedic civilization. Not only did the Vedic sacrifice create the sacred authority which the Vedas hold for Hindus today, but the patterns of its ritual and the interpretations of its priests also became the standard for the society as a whole.

These priests composed lengthy treatises called *Brahmanas* which prescribed the steps for performing both public and domestic rites such as one that took place around a sacred fire and another that used a powerful hallucinogen called *soma*. These rites were performed to maintain social order and to assure well-being, long life, sons, and wealth (in cattle) to all members of good standing in the Aryan community who sponsored the ceremonies. These texts also placed the priests, as the sole possessors of sacrificial power or *Brahman*, at the top of a fourfold social order known as the caste or *varna* scale.

The quest for the deepest meaning of these sacrifices produced another set of priestly texts called *Upanishads*. This teaching introduced many important traditional Hindu beliefs, such as the law of *karma*—that every deed has a moral consequence—and the concept of the transmigration of the soul—that one's deepest self experiences an endless cycle of births and deaths.

Most important of the Upanishadic teachings involved the search for this deepest, transcending self. According to the *Upanishads*, the ultimate function of the sacrifice is to bring about the transformation of the body-imprisoned egos into the fullness of their reality as spiritual beings. Carl Jung once wrote that if a butterfly were ever to become aware of the myriad forces of nature that conspired at a single moment to transform it from a cocoon into a butterfly, that awareness would be a religious experience. Entering into the fullness of one's life as a sacrifice, as an ultimate sacred act, became for the Vedic priesthood the means to that transformation.

Performing and teaching the sacrifice was the sole preserve of the priesthood. Just how exclusive the priesthood was is revealed in the Epics, later literary works which draw upon other traditions of lore during the late Vedic period. These include the *Mahabharata*, the longest epic in the world, and the *Ramayana*. Both describe a society divided into small kingdoms ruled by chivalrous kings. The social

and world order which they describe is not based on the rite of sacrifice, nor maintained by the *Brahmin* priests. It is based rather upon the princes' strict adherence to their social duty, called *dharma*. The heroes of the *Mahabharata* are five brothers who, as princes, seek to become the rightful heirs to their father's throne. The eldest of the five is the model of righteousness, for which he bears the title "the King of Dharma." Similarly, Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*, is portrayed as a severely righteous prince.

THE BUDDHIST CIVILIZATION (500 B.C. - 300 A.D.)

The life of the Buddha during the fifth century B.C. introduced a new philosophy into the royal layer of Indian civilization. Siddhartha Gautama was born a prince in the tiny kingdom of the Sakyas, near the eastern end of the Gangetic Plain. Already uneasy amidst the royal splendor in which he was raised, Siddhartha chanced one day upon a man who was ill, one who was old, one who was dead, and a religious mendicant. Moved with compassion by this first experience of the human condition, he abandoned his princely surroundings to seek a deeper meaning to his life. After searching for several years and practicing extreme asceticism, he received an insight into the ultimate truth of reality. He became the "enlightened one," the Buddha.

As the Vedic tradition had maintained that life is most authentic and meaningful as a sacred act of sacrifice, so the Buddha's primary insight was of cosmic proportions: All of life is sorrow. Its most enduring quality is its transience. Nothing is permanent.

To overcome the consummate sorrow which comes of our attachment to the world, the Buddha taught an eightfold path of righteousness, called *Dharma* or the "Way," to guide his followers through the steps to spiritual insight. Having left this teaching as a legacy and set an example for the religious

life, he entered into the final enlightenment: the absolute nothing of *nirvana*.

The Buddha's followers formed an ascetic religious community of saffron-robed mendicants, called the *sangha*. As they wandered, these mendicants spread the Buddha's teaching throughout the subcontinent. Their success in this mission to proclaim his "Path" led to the rapid expansion of the new religion across the Great Central Plain.

The high point of this expansion was the conversion of the Mauryan emperor, Asoka, to the Buddha's "Path" in 270 B.C. Because his empire spanned much of the subcontinent, the emperor's conversion gave a wide legitimacy to this new religious faith. The sincerity of his commitment to shun aggression and to seek "safety, self-control, justice, and happiness for all beings," gave prominence to the Buddha's "Path" and carried it to the world.

Asoka believed his imperial authority was a religious duty to insure the well-being of all his subjects. He declared this sacred trust in one of the edicts which he had inscribed on tall pillars throughout his empire to assert his royal authority and proclaim the holy "Way," the Dharma of the Buddha. "Whatever exertion I make, I strive only to discharge the debt that I owe to all living creatures."²

The unusually compassionate quality of Asoka's imperial rule led to the adoption of the top of an Asokan pillar, carved in the third century B.C., as the official seal of the Republic of India in 1950.

THE CLASSICAL HINDU CIVILIZATION (300 - 1000 A.D.)

The rise of the Gupta dynasty in the fourth century A.D. brought extensive areas of the Great Central Plain under the imperial rule of these Hindu monarchs. Their authority was not a return to the severe and rigid chivalry of the era of the Epics. Rather, it drew together many strands of South Asian

culture. The influence of the new religions, Jainism and Buddhism, together with a great surge of popular lore infused South Asian civilization with a new enthusiasm and theistic fervor. The austerity and the refined, sacrificial purity of the earlier eras gave way to recitations of the cosmic exploits of unnumbered gods and heroes from a mythic past. Life was no longer a sacrifice, but a divine play which was to be tasted and enjoyed.

The consummate image of the Gupta era is the mythical figure of the heaven cow, the Kamadhenu. This divine creature in the realm of heaven bears a special, bovine concern for the hopes and longings of humans here on earth. Her sacred role is to provide for all who ardently seek whatever they desire—be it wealth, pleasure, comfort, or security. At the same time, and with equal benevolence, she grants to each person the opposite: poverty, pain, discomfort, and anxiety.

The most important development of the Classical Hindu period was the royal court itself. In that setting not only was there the accumulation of patronage needed to sponsor grand designs, but there was also the refinement of style and beauty which engendered some of the most powerful creations of South Asian art, music, philosophy, and literature. It was in many ways a golden age.

THE MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION **(1200 - 1707)**

The two periods which followed the Aryan migration into South Asia, the Buddhist and the Classical Hindu, had their origin in the Gangetic Plain. They grew and expanded from within. In the twelfth century, the subcontinent experienced another significant migration—not of people but of religion. The faith of Islam moved rapidly across the Central Plain, establishing yet another layer of the already diverse tradition which comprises South Asian civilization.



(United Nations photo.)

The Taj Mahal at Agra, India, was built by the Moghul Emperor Shah Jahan in 1631-1645 in memory of his favorite wife. It stands today as a legacy of the Medieval Islamic period in India.

This dynamic new faith was first brought to South Asia by wandering Sufi mystics. The intensity of their spiritual discipline and the depth of their religious awareness were readily honored, and they became venerated as saints. They stirred a new devotion, and many converted to the teachings of Islam, particularly the people of the Indus and Brahmaputra River Plains.

The Moghuls who came to the subcontinent during the sixteenth century established an Islamic royalty in South Asia. Originally, they were martial Turks who were forced into South Asia by Genghis Khan's triumphant march from China to the west. The Moghuls, with their strength and religious zeal, quickly overran the Central Plain and placed it under their imperial rule.

Akbar was the second and most important of the Moghul kings. For all his martial strength, he is best remembered for the opulence and splendor of his court, his tolerance and universalist understanding of religion, and the fine Persian adornments on his throne. The Taj Mahal, the architectural masterpiece built by his grandson Shah Jahan, is a monument to Akbar's reign. But more fitting as an image of Moghul rule is Akbar's own capital city, Fatehpur Sikri. Standing high above the surrounding plain, this massive palatial complex—two square miles of parks and buildings—reveals the harmony between Akbar's conceptions and the effective power of his administration. Yet, for all its strength and beauty, this city was strangely out of touch with reality. Abandoned almost as soon as it was completed, it stood uninhabited for three hundred years because it lacked an adequate supply of water.

BRITISH COLONIAL RULE (1756 - 1947)

The splendor of the Moghul kings and the finery of their courts and palaces lured many European explorers to South Asia during the sixteenth century. Their quest for eastern

riches gave the name "Indian" to America's own native population, a name based more on the explorers' hopes than on what they found in the new world.

The commerce which brought the British to South Asia is one of the most ancient and persistent strands in this civilization. Even today the small, single-masted sailing barges, called "bunder boats" still ply the coastline of the Arabian Sea, continuing the ancient exchange of merchandise and ideas with the coming of the annual monsoon winds. This commerce was the source of the legendary wealth of ivory, gold, and peacocks brought to the court of King Solomon from Ophir during the tenth century B.C. It was also an integral part of the Harappan City culture of the third millenia B.C.

Because their interest in South Asia was commercial, the British initially had no designs on political control. Forts and factories maintained by the East India Company of London along the coast at Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta were the extent of British encroachment upon the land. The company had only two interests in the affairs of state: to protect its warehouses on the shore and to keep other European interests from conquering its markets and interrupting its trade. These interests were protected by treaties between the East India Company and the princely states of South Asia. It was not until 1857, following the Sepoy Mutiny, that Queen Victoria became the first British monarch to hold imperial power over the lands of the subcontinent, which had come increasingly under the administration of the East India Company.

The East India Company took control over South Asia with great reluctance. But with the onset of British rule, a layer of Westernizing influences began to develop within South Asian society. Modernization began in the seventeenth century with the clerks and bearers who were employed by the company. By the beginning of the twentieth century, a new social class of South Asians had emerged com-

posed of administrators, military officers, lawyers, and doctors trained in European universities. Under the British colonial government, the vision of becoming a modern society and an independent nation was born. Thus, the idea of freedom from colonial rule was spawned within the colonial rule itself.

Modernization came to South Asia during this period. Because the British were reluctant to govern any more than they had to, this modernization only touched the surface of the subcontinent. But because of the way the indigenous civilization was prepared to receive it, modernization formed yet another, distinct layer of South Asian culture.

In this chapter we have skipped through five thousand years of history at a rate of more than 500 years per page. Even such a quick glance reveals certain key features about the culture. Continuity is one of the most important of them. The culture of South Asia is basically conservative; it has accumulated tradition in a large number of separate strands. Some of them were assimilated and then disappeared, as in the case of the Buddhist tradition. Others have been assimilated and yet remained distinct, such as the Vedic and popular religious traditions which emerged during the classical period. And some remain separate, such as the Moghul level of the Islamic tradition. This conservative assimilation sustains an extensive pluralism within the culture of South Asia all the time.

Also evident in this long history of South Asia is that the subcontinent has never been politically unified. We have identified several of the great empires during its past. The influence of each has been extensive, in both area and time, but none of them ever held political control over all of the people of South Asia.

This account of South Asian civilization reveals that political sovereignty has never been sufficient to contain the multiplicity of languages, religions, and customs which exist there: Its pluralism is too extensive. Its diversity as a civilization, like the diversity of its environment, expresses

the height, breadth, and depth of human experience.

Experiencing these limits of political control is one of the greatest challenges to the process of modernization. As we shall see, each of the separate nations of the subcontinent must strive to discover its own identity as a people.



NEW NATIONS OF SOUTH ASIA

The Great Central Plain of South Asia is today divided between three separate nations: India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. For almost a century before 1947, this area had been under the overriding authority of British colonial rule, known as the British Raj. When the British decided to relinquish their Indian Empire, they assumed that the whole area under their jurisdiction would become a single nation. Toward this end, they introduced many elements of a stable, independent, modern democratic government. There were limited representative assemblies on both the provincial and the federal level. A new capital city, New Delhi, was started in 1912. Many South Asians were groomed in an administrative service and in a national army, both established in the best tradition of British colonial government.

A major concern of the British Raj in preparing for the independence of its Indian subjects was to protect the many diverse minority communities on the subcontinent under the rule of a single, democratically-elected authority. Responding to this concern, the Indian National Congress, under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, offered a vision of national unity for all people based not on protecting minorities but on increasing public political participation in such a way that all of the myriad ethnic and linguistic differences would be recognized and respected.

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1887 to press for more opportunities for Indians to serve in the elite

ranks of British colonial government. During the 1920s Gandhi changed its focus. He restructured the Congress into a grass roots movement designed to involve all the people under the Raj in a movement for political independence. Gandhi believed independent government (*swaraj*) started in the village, because that is where the people are. Independent government could then be gradually built up from the village to the national level.

According to Gandhi's scheme, each village was to be run by a local *panchayat*, or council of five members, representing a cross-section of the various communities in the village. Consensus among these members was to determine policy, assuring that all points of view represented on the panchayat would be considered.

Representatives from the villages were organized into district Congresses, which would in turn select representatives to a Regional Congress. These regional congresses were based, not according to the administrative provinces of the British Raj, but instead according to the different language areas. Each regional Congress would then send delegates to the All-India National Congress. The national Congress at its annual gathering would respond to the needs and concerns of the various levels of government, as reported by each regional Congress's delegates. Gandhi's intent in creating such an elaborate structure was to make the Congress at the national level responsive to the people in the villages.

The Congress became, under Gandhi's leadership during the 1920s, a popular political organization. When this organization was put into effect, it set up a political infrastructure throughout the subcontinent which ignored the British provincial divisions and side-stepped its authority. It was a strong foundation upon which to build an independent nation-state. When the independence of India was established in 1947, the Congress took over the reins of government from the British Raj, becoming the ruling political party in the

provisional National Assembly.

The Muslim League was another political organization active in the years before independence. It was formed in 1909 to represent the interests of the twenty percent of the subcontinent's population who were Muslim. During the 1930s, it sought another solution to the problem of protecting minorities. Ultimately, in 1940, it demanded that the Muslims in the Indian Empire be recognized as a separate Islamic state, called Pakistan.

The British responded to the opposing concepts of national independence set forward by the Congress and the League by dividing the subcontinent into separate nations on the basis of Hindu-Muslim religious community dominance. Those administrative districts in which the Muslims were in a majority were set apart from those where Hindus were dominant. Because the Muslims were in a majority only in the Indus River Valley and the Brahmaputra River Valley, this method of division created a country in two sections a thousand miles apart. These two sections of Pakistan looked like a pair of wings on the shoulders of the subcontinent.

The British scheme for dividing India allowed for the possibility that two states which were not under direct British colonial jurisdiction might also become part of this Islamic nation. The state of Hyderabad, in the center of the Deccan plateau, had a Hindu majority but was under the rule of a hereditary Muslim leader, the Nizam. Kashmir, in the Himalayan region, had a Muslim majority, but a Hindu maharajah. As it turned out, both states were joined to India in a series of events which created much bitterness and led to a battle between Pakistan and India over Kashmir. A cease-fire line through the remote Himalayan mountain region still divides that state between India and Pakistan.

THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA

Upon becoming independent in 1947, both India and

Pakistan had to define themselves as independent, sovereign governments. In India, this was accomplished by the adoption of a Constitution on January 26, 1950, establishing the nation as a secular, democratic republic.

This Constitution incorporated many concepts from Western political theory. Its framers, under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, deliberately drew upon the American, French, and Irish constitutions as viable models for a modern state. Its Preamble has a familiar sound; it declares that it is the responsibility of the republic to ensure that all citizens enjoy:

JUSTICE, social, economic, and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship; EQUALITY of status and opportunity; and . . . FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation.

The Constitution separates the powers of government into three branches: the legislative, the executive, and the judicial. This pattern is also familiar to us, although the relationship between the legislative and the executive branches in India follows the British model. The initiative and responsibility for leadership rests in Parliament, in the person of the prime minister, not with the president.

The president is elected by a majority of the legislators, not directly by the electorate, for a term of five years. Once elected, the president serves more as a symbolic head of state than as a political leader. His role is so severely limited by the Constitution that it gives him no authority to determine national policy.

The most important body of the government is the lower of the two houses of Parliament, the Lok Sabha ("The House of the People"). Almost all of its 524 members are democratically-elected representatives from proportional electoral districts in each of the twenty-two states in the republic. They all serve terms in office for up to five years. All adult citizens

are entitled to vote in the national elections for the representative from their district.

The prime minister, the leader of this House, is officially invited by the president to form a ministry. But because he or she must enjoy the support of a majority of the House in order to remain in power, the president looks to the leadership of the majority party to nominate a candidate for this position. In every national election since 1952, with the exception of the one in 1977, the Congress Party has either won a majority of the seats in the Lok Sabha or has been able to hold together a ruling coalition of parties. The selection of the prime minister has therefore been largely made within the ranks of this party.

Should the prime minister lose a vote of confidence (a motion attached to almost all major legislation), he or she would be forced to resign. Because the ruling Congress Party held a majority in the Lok Sabha from the first national election in 1952 until 1977, there were during that time no votes of no confidence. Only in 1979, when infighting in the then-ruling Janata Party eroded Prime Minister Moraji Desai's support, did such a vote occur—and Desai resigned.

In such a circumstance, if the president feels that another member of the Lok Sabha has the support of a majority, he may invite him to form a government. If no other member is able to win the support of a majority of the Lok Sabha, the president then dissolves the Parliament and declares a national election to determine which party can win enough support among the people to form a new government.

In 1979, President Reddi invited Charan Singh to form a government, following Prime Minister Moraji Desai's defeat by a no confidence vote. Charan Singh's inability to gain the necessary support led to the national elections in 1980. In that election, Indira Gandhi's wing of the Congress Party (which had been ousted in the elections of 1977) won by an overwhelming majority. Upon the convening of the new Parliament, she was again invited to serve as prime minister.

According to the Constitution, a new election must be held at least every five years. If none has been held during that time, Parliament is automatically dissolved. Every member must then stand for reelection if he wishes to continue in office. The dissolution of Parliament at the end of five years was the rule during the early years of the republic, when the government was firmly under the control of its first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. The first four national elections, from 1952 to 1967, were held at the full five-year intervals.

The prime minister may ask the president to dissolve Parliament at any time within that interval. He may especially wish to do so at a time when his popularity is at a peak, to assure a favorable outcome in the election which follows. This happened in 1970, when then-prime minister, Indira Gandhi, made the request. The fifth national election was held a year earlier than required by the Constitution. While many thought that her power was waning, her overwhelming victory in that election proved the political wisdom of her choice.

The Constitution of the Republic of India has worked well over the past thirty-five years. It has provided a stable structure and consistent authority for the conduct of the nation's public affairs in a variety of circumstances. Effective government of widely diverse peoples in a linguistically-divided country is working. Several factors have contributed to this stability.

The role of political parties, particularly the Congress Party, has been important. Because these parties have had to organize and win popular support on at least a regional level in order to be effective, they have enlisted people from a variety of backgrounds and encouraged their participation in the political process. The parties have become, in this way, a broadening and unifying force. Yet only the Congress Party, because of the grass roots base and all-India perspective which Gandhi gave to the Indian National Congress before it became a political party in 1947, has been able to retain a



(UPI photo.)

In 1975 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (daughter of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru) posed a threat to India's Constitution when she invoked emergency powers after being charged with election irregularities.

wide national following. Its long dominance in the Parliament has helped to sustain consistent and cooperative leadership among the different branches of government. The party has also maintained a national perspective on political issues, giving the country a sense of common identity and purpose.

The quiet but vital role of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) has also been significant. Recruited by competitive exam from among the best students in the universities each year, this elite corps of highly trained and dedicated civil servants has provided wisdom and consistency to the government's policies. The IAS officers have functioned well, both as secretaries to the ministries of government which formulate legislation and as the executives who implement it. Even though the armed services are used to help with famine and flood control, the effective control of the IAS has removed any temptation from the military to become involved in the government of India. Notable has been the absence, or even the threat, of military coups in India's recent history.

The firm leadership of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, also contributed to India's national stability. A man of great dignity and stature as well as an astute politician who appealed to a wide spectrum of support, Nehru led the government for the first seventeen years following independence. Most important, he was not only concerned with implementing national policies of economic growth and social welfare but was also deeply committed to the democratic process. He directed his considerable skills to making democracy work for the benefit of the people.

His daughter, Indira Gandhi (no relation to the Mahatma), has served as Nehru's successor as prime minister for fourteen years. She has demonstrated many of her father's skills and concerns, but she is also responsible for the most direct threat to India's Constitution in its more than thirty-year history. In 1975 (in response to charges of election

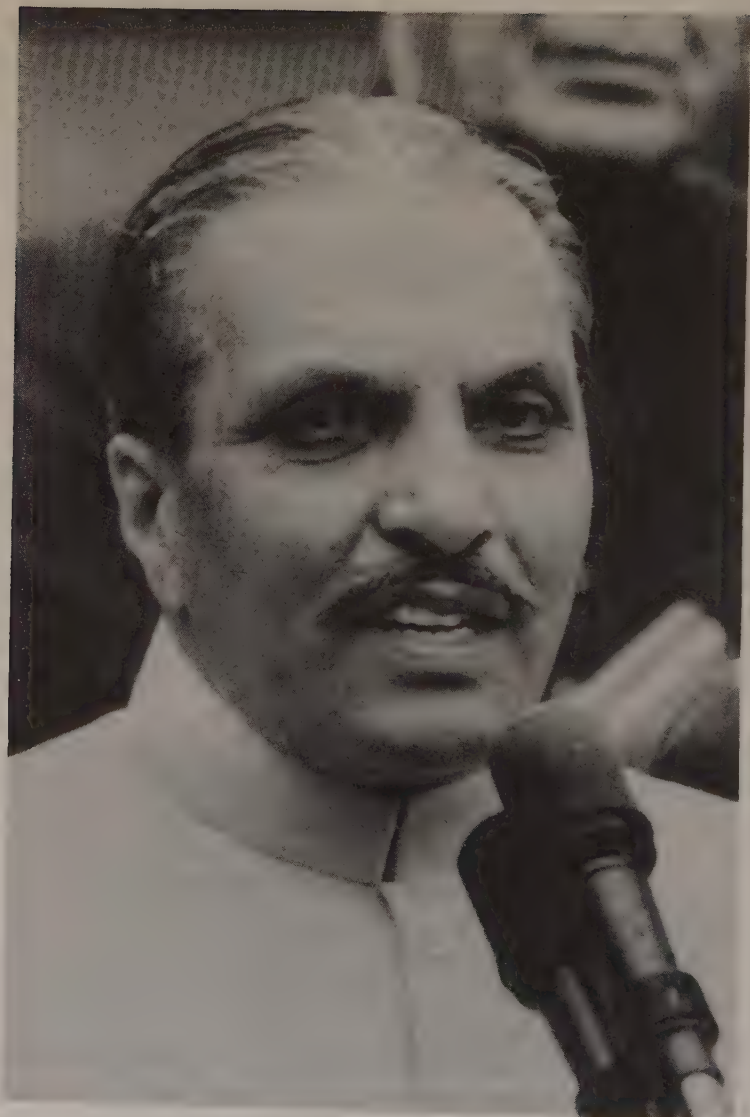
irregularities made against her), Mrs. Gandhi invoked an emergency power within the Constitution to suspend both it and the civil liberties it protected. National elections were postponed, opposition leaders were put into prison, and press censorship was imposed.

In an equally surprising move two years later, Mrs. Gandhi relaxed the emergency powers and called for a national election. In that election, the people of India affirmed their growing faith in democracy. Unexpectedly, she was defeated in her own district, and her party was voted out of control of Parliament. Mrs. Gandhi successfully returned to Parliament and to the office of Prime Minister following the elections of 1981. Through the declaration of emergency and the unsettled rule of the Janata Party which followed, the sovereign power of the Constitution of 1950 was maintained. Its effectiveness as an expression of the identity of the people of India as a modern nation was affirmed.

THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN

In 1947, Pakistan became a totally new Islamic nation. From the very moment of its independence it was faced with many formidable obstacles. One of the greatest, which it shared with India, was the immense disruption and bloodshed caused by the mass migration of Sikhs and Hindus to the Indian side of the partition line and the influx of Muslims into Pakistan. As a result of the division of Pakistan and India, an estimated twelve million people became homeless refugees and many hundreds of thousands were violently and senselessly killed. This left a scar of human misery that the balm of independence could not soothe. The task of resettling the refugees and seeking reparation for their losses fell to the new Pakistani administration. In the wake of this mass migration, this task was almost impossible.

Adding to the difficulty of establishing a consistent



(UPI photo.)

Chief of Staff General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq is the latest in a series of Pakistani leaders to impose martial law on the Muslim nation.

national policy was the wide separation between the two wings of Pakistan. Not only were the two sections a thousand miles apart, but they were also separated by language, culture, and tradition. All the two had in common was the predominance of their Islamic faith: ninety-eight percent of the population of West Pakistan and eighty percent of the population of East Pakistan was Muslim. These two wings finally became separate countries in 1971, when East Pakistan became Bangladesh.

A third difficulty which the new government of Pakistan faced was the loss of the federal bureaucracy set up by the British Raj before independence. Most of this administration, as well as the commercial centers of the subcontinent, were on the Indian side of the partition line.

Because none of the provincial governments held over from the colonial period were enthusiastic about a separate Pakistan, much of the work of creating this new nation fell to those who had previously lived among Muslim minorities in the urban centers and along the Gangetic Plain. The actual reins of government were taken up by the Muslim League, which itself had found its greatest following before independence in areas which were now part of India: in those districts where many Muslims lived but did not constitute a majority.

The first leader of Pakistan was Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the president of the Muslim League. Jinnah was himself an ex-patriot from India, as were all who served under him in those early days. His was a solitary leadership; he had no associates, only lieutenants. Because of the strength of his personality and his vision of Islamic nationality, he became in a very important sense not just the leader but the new national identity of Pakistan.

As though the difficulties which Pakistan faced were not enough, Governor-General and President Jinnah died thirteen months after Pakistan's independence, in September

1948. His successor, Liaquat Ali Khan, was assassinated in 1951.

All of the obstacles which the young country faced are reflected in the history of Pakistan's constitutions. The first was not adopted until 1956. Even then, it was not the result of an orderly process but was precipitated by the defeat of the Muslim League as the ruling party in a provincial election in East Pakistan in 1954. The potential division of the country due to the waning of the Muslim League's power as an effective political force for unity was delayed when both East and West Pakistan agreed to adopt a constitution in which each would have an equal number of members in the National Assembly as well as its own Provincial Assembly. This constitution affirmed the two wings' common sovereign identity as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

But the fragmenting political forces which had been unleashed did not abate. In 1958 the instability of the country led to the imposition of martial law by General Ayub Khan, the chief of staff of the Pakistan army. The first constitution was then abandoned.

In 1962 General Ayub Khan proclaimed a new constitution, in which he sought to base national political authority in the local level through a tiered representative structure reminiscent of Gandhi's organization of the Congress in the 1920s. Khan called this program "Basic Democracy." In accordance with the 1962 constitution, he was elected President of Pakistan in 1965 by the National Assembly.

President Ayub Khan's attempt at reform threatened the traditional leaders sufficiently to throw the country into political unrest. In 1969 he was forced to resign. The rule of the country then went to his successor as army chief of staff, General Yahya Khan.

Under President Yahya Khan, the first national elections in the almost twenty-five year history of Pakistan's independence were held. But the result, rather than the unification of the country under a federal structure, was the

undoing of the two wings. These elections gave to Sheik Mujib Rahman and his Awami League all of the East Pakistan seats, and thus control of the National Assembly. President Yahya Khan's reluctance to convene the assembly because of these election results set in motion the events which led to the collapse of the army's control in East Pakistan and to the independence of Bangladesh as a separate nation.

It is remarkable that this separation took so long to happen—almost twenty-five years—and that the Pakistani army, under martial law administrator President Yahya Khan, resisted it with such violent reprisals. The independence of Bangladesh was achieved with as much suffering and horror as the separation of India and Pakistan in 1947. Millions became refugees and hundreds of thousands were killed in the nine months of bloodshed.

The humiliation which the army experienced because of this separation forced General Yahya Khan to resign as president in favor of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the president of a new political force in West Pakistan: the Pakistan Peoples' Party. The son of a wealthy landowner in Sindh, one of the four provinces of West Pakistan, Bhutto was the first "man of the people" ever to hold such high office in the country. During the early years of his presidency, yet another constitution, which returned the authority of the government to the National Assembly, was adopted in 1973. Under its provisions, Bhutto became prime minister.

In 1977 national elections to the Assembly were held for only the second time in Pakistan's history. It seemed certain that Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples' Party would win in this election, if only by a slim majority. But Bhutto, whose leadership was characterized by impatience, seemed unsure. He tampered with the vote in order to ensure the outcome. He won a sweeping victory, but at tremendous cost. Those political leaders who were defeated used their traditional sources of power to protest the election. Their protest led to

such unrest that once again the army stepped in. Chief of Staff General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq suspended the constitution and imposed martial law on the country. Bhutto was arrested and, in 1979, executed on a charge of murder. Another attempt to achieve political unity based on a constitutional process had failed.

Whether Pakistan will be able to form a stable government based on a constitution that both expresses and enforces a unified identity as an Islamic nation remains an open question.

In spite of the many obstacles which Pakistan has had to face since its inception and its many periods of political instability, it has continued to exist as an independent nation. Some would trace this continuity to Punjabi dominance of an army which seems all too eager to rule the country. The Punjabis, an ethnic and linguistic group, are the most populous in the country, representing sixty-five percent of the total population.

Pakistan's record, from Jinnah to Ayub Khan to Bhutto to Zia, suggests that its stability is dependent upon the consistent and forceful authority of a powerful leader. This is Pakistan's legacy from the Moghuls who held imperial power in northern India from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Because Pakistan originated as a Muslim state in 1947, its leaders must also have a strong commitment to Islam. In order to develop as a modern democratic nation Pakistan needs a strong leader who has enough charisma to win the hearts of the people, enough vision to encompass their wide diversity, and enough commitment to democracy to retain their support.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

Bangladesh, in its short life as an independent country since 1971, has experienced similar turmoil. The charismatic leadership of Sheik Mujib Rahman, who led the people to

independence, resulted in a national election in 1972. But his authority as prime minister was dulled by the difficulties of governing a country rife with poverty and afflicted with natural calamities. He was assassinated in 1975, and martial law was imposed by army chief of staff, General Ziam Rahman, in 1976. Upon his election as president in 1979, Ziam Rahman ended martial law. But he, too, was assassinated in 1981, and martial law was again imposed in 1982.

This disruption and instability in the national life of Bangladesh has paralleled Pakistan's experience. The question arises: What consistent form of popular government can be both adequate to the extreme demands of the country's social and natural conditions and responsive to the will of its people?

By comparison with Pakistan and Bangladesh, India's record seems impressive. But it also needs a strong leadership to hold together a diverse conglomerate of peoples, religions, languages, and traditions under a single nation. The pressures toward political fission are always present and must be carefully contained.

The response of the Indian people to the declaration of emergency in 1975-1977 by ousting Mrs. Gandhi during the elections of 1977 suggests that their commitment to democracy has grown significantly since independence. The electoral process, as defined by the Constitution, set a limit to autocratic rule beyond which the people would not permit their leadership to go. When Mrs. Gandhi transgressed that limit by suspending the nation's civil liberties in 1975, she lost the support of the people and was defeated at the polls in 1977. But holding her accountable for its loss of freedom did not diminish the nation's need for strong leadership, nor did it diminish Mrs. Gandhi's recognized ability, within clear constitutional limits, to fulfill that need.



THE VILLAGE

The previous chapter described the South Asian people's attempts to find consistent and authentic identities as nations. The structures used in these attempts are familiar; we know what nations and constitutions are. However, it is difficult to apply these structures in the South Asian situation because they are not so familiar there. Each nation's struggle to find an authentic national identity and to affirm it in an effective constitution reveal that structures other than those which are familiar to us are at work. To understand what these structures are, what is really going on in the everyday lives of the people there, we have to go to the villages. We will find there a more traditional context which will provide us with a better insight into how modernization is actually taking place.

The village is an essential fact of life in South Asia. About eighty percent of its population live in villages with average populations of less than one thousand people. This is in vivid contrast to our own society, where over seventy percent of the United States population lives in urban areas. Today, however, the migration trends in South Asia are toward the cities, as indicated by the immense growth of the populations in Karachi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, and Delhi during recent decades.

As commercial and industrial centers, these cities have a distinctive urban elite. This community of professionals, administrators, and business leaders is in many ways detached from the rural context of South Asian life and is evolving on its own a modern cosmopolitan life-style. But

most of those who have moved to the cities come in search of employment, leaving their families behind in the villages. They retain a strong sense of their village identity. They seek out and dwell among members of their own village who have moved earlier, forming extensions of the village patterns within the city. Those who find employment usually send a portion of their earnings to their families. Even whole families who have settled in the city return to the village for important occasions, such as a marriage or annual festivals. Thus, even among the twenty percent who comprise the urban population of the subcontinent, village identification is still immediate and vital.

On the outskirts of each village lies its cultivated lands, small patchwork plots outlined with mounds of packed dirt or irrigation channels. The village's livelihood is drawn primarily from the soil, and much of the village activity centers around these plots of land. Oxen pull metal-tipped plows; People seed the fields by hand. Transplanting the rice seedlings and weeding are also done manually by rows of women dressed in saris. These women move in slow ranks across water-soaked fields called paddies.

The uncertainty of the rainfall and the anticipation of the harvest only increase the villagers' closeness to the forces of nature. The villagers have found an almost heroic place among the urban elite and in the pages of South Asia's modern literature. They are portrayed as sincere and dedicated cultivators, who steadfastly sustain their marginal existence from the barren soil.

Mango trees or coconut palms flank the villages' fields. In the village itself, small mud huts with roofs of palm boughs or corrugated tin surround an occasional grouping of brick and stucco houses. Potters lift small clay pots from the wheel, washermen whack clothes against a rock at the side of a canal or the village pond, and women swing large, clay water pots onto their heads to carry them from the village well to their homes.



(United Nations photo/J.P. Laffont.)

Although some villagers have begun to use modern farming equipment, some still rely on the sickle and other primitive tools to tend their fields.

The normal round of rituals and chores reflects the rhythmic patterns of cultivation in the fields—patterns which are intensified at the time of harvest and major village festivals. But village life also reveals an infinite, spontaneous variety of human feelings and interactions. These too are structured within an intricate pattern of established social relationships.

The most basic human relationships are those in the family. Many of our feelings and expectations are defined by the kinship roles we are in. We react differently to others depending on whether he or she is a spouse, a younger sibling, or an in-law. In South Asia, these inter-family relations are quite different from ours.

Child-rearing practices in South Asia place far greater emphasis on parental authority and judgment. In the child's early years there are many subtle ways in which the superiority of the parent and the dependence of the child are reinforced. One of the most common is an almost universal unwillingness on the part of a parent to praise a child or encourage his or her initiative.

Another dramatic illustration of the difference in family roles between our culture and South Asia's is the practice of selecting marriage partners. The choice of our prospective husband or wife is largely our own; parental influence must be both indirect and subtle to be effective at all. In rural South Asia, the parents are expected to select the bride or groom for their children, although variations in this practice do occur. A liberal family may permit a child to meet his or her prospective spouse before the wedding. The child may even exercise a veto if the parents' candidate does not meet with his or her approval. But the basic pattern of parental responsibility for arranging a marriage remains common practice.

This custom seems very strange to us. But even Westernized students in the universities give valid reasons for the practice. In a society that allows few opportunities for boys and girls to

meet and to talk freely outside their own homes, these students are glad to have their parents conduct the search and make the choice. They believe parents know their children well and have their best interests at heart, and, significantly, these children respect their parents' judgment.

Another factor which favors the arranged marriage over what in India is called "the love marriage" is the joint family. Married children are expected to live with their parents. The joint family works on two assumptions: First, a son remains subservient to his father for his entire life, even after the son's marriage. Marriage does not, as in our society, place a son or daughter in an autonomous state of adulthood. Second, the marriage relationship is sustained by the family as a whole and not by an affection bond between two individuals. A woman not only begins a new life with the man she marries but is caught up in a whole series of relationships with others in the family: with her mother-in-law, her husband's brothers, and with their wives and children as well.

This concept of marriage is difficult for us to imagine. Indeed, if we tried to follow this practice without adopting other patterns and assumptions of South Asian society, it would quickly prove intolerable for us. The reverse is also true. Without the adoption of our social presuppositions—particularly our ideas of individual independence and self-reliance—our marriage practices would prove equally unworkable in the villages of India, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, or Pakistan.

The limits of a joint family are hard to define. Distant cousins often arrive from some quarter, expecting to be received in the home, but limits to the family do exist. In general, the members of a joint family may be defined as all of those who eat a meal cooked on a common fire. This definition recognizes the large number of rules and social expectations which govern dining in the traditional village home, but it also recognizes that the rules are applied with great flexibility, allowing the head of the household to

determine in any given circumstance just how far he considers the limits of his family to extend.

Prospective spouses are selected by another set of complex rules. These rules establish what are called "preferred mates," all the while recognizing that in practice exceptions are common. In the south of India, for example, the preferred mate for a son would be the daughter of his mother's brother, or his maternal first cousin. Marriage to a daughter of his father's brother, however, is strictly forbidden.

In north India, one is not permitted to marry someone from his father's family. Nor does one marry someone from his own village. In both the north and south he is expected to marry someone who belongs to his own caste community, a social group generally identified by the term *jati*. This is primarily an extended kinship group into which one is placed by birth and which provides its members with a reservoir of preferred marriage mates.

In a typical village there would be several *jatis*, ranging from two or three in the more tribally-structured villages of the remote Himalayan region to as many as twenty in the densely populated Gangetic Plain. Since wives must come from outside the husband's village, *jatis* also extend beyond the village. Through this marriage practice, *jatis* create webs of relationships that link numerous neighboring villages.

A *jati* also defines itself through a common occupation, such as farming, carpentry, weaving, or tanning. This occupation usually provides the name for the community and identifies the traditional activity of its male members in the economic life of the village.

The most distinctive characteristic of the *jati* is not its kinship or occupational base. It is, rather, its placement as a social group in a distinct social rank with respect to all of the other *jatis* in a village. Everyone is thus placed by birth in a hierarchical system that ranks the traditional priest and land-owning communities at the top, the craft *jatis* in the middle, and the menials, "untouchables," on the bottom. One's

interaction with others in the village who do not belong to the same jati will be influenced, if not determined, by the respective rank of their jatis to each other. People do not approach each other as equals, except when they are both small children.

This jati ranking system provides those in the same village with what we call "horizontal linkages." Those who belong to a weavers' jati tend to live in that part of the village known as the weavers' quarter. The Brahmins, the traditional priests, also tend to reside together in the special sections closest to the village temple. And the untouchables are often found in a separate settlement some distance away.

Each jati has its own set of distinctive practices, its own dialect and dress, and its own leadership. A council of elders arbitrates disputes between members and encourages those practices which maintain the distinctiveness and unity of the group. Irregularities or failure to observe the customs may be punished by the council—even to the point of expulsion for a serious offense. Changes do occur, both in the rank of a jati with respect to other jatis and in their customs: their eating habits, dress, and occupation. But these changes occur slowly and only with the concurrence of the group as a whole.

The criteria which rank one jati over another in a village are not clearly defined and vary greatly from one village to another. For example, members of a particular jati of washermen in Village A may find themselves ranked higher than their own jati with whom they exchange brides in Village B. That the Brahmins are at the top and the untouchables—the street sweepers, lavatory cleaners, and leather workers—at the bottom suggests that a concern for ritual purity and freedom from pollution determines the extremes of this caste system. But for the jatis in the middle—the cultivators, merchants, and village craftsmen—the relative purity of one over another may be based on a number of variable factors. A community of goatherders, for example, normally has a low rank on the purity scale. But that did not

prevent a goatherd jati from successfully claiming high rank in a north Indian village. Their claim was based on their economic position. The jati acquired some agricultural land in an auction three generations ago on which they have been cultivating crops rather than herding goats. In that same village, a carpenter jati claims equal status with the Brahmins.

The ranking of these social groups, together with their self-enforcing unity, enhances the stability of the village as a whole. Everyone has a place. Vertical movement does occur, but since upward movement occurs at the expense of another jati, tensions among jatis can be very great. Only with great reluctance will a jati accept its own demotion in rank.

Because there are no clear or consistent standards of ranking, jatis in the middle ranks are constantly testing their status with other closely-ranked jatis. This tension among the jatis explains why there is great resistance to the elevation of the untouchable communities to a more equal and humane status in village society. The resistance comes not from those at the top, who by and large support the elimination of untouchability as a social evil; it comes from those jatis which are immediately above the untouchables in the social scale. They see equality for those below them occurring at their own expense. The difficulty of assuring equal opportunities for minorities in the United States reveals a similar pattern. The greatest resistance comes from low-income groups who feel they would suffer economically by a change in the status of other minorities.

Also within the village are groups that form "vertical linkages" perpendicular to the horizontally stratifying jati system. These groups, which draw members of several different jatis together into a single unit, are called "factions." Factions are not as cohesive or stable as jatis. They can come into being whenever a leader in the village needs the support of others who are outside his own jati caste. This need usually develops when he is competing for either power or privilege with another member of the village. An appeal for

intercaste, factional support occurs most frequently today in village-wide election campaigns, in which a plurality of the votes is needed to win public office. But the practice has long been established in situations where two families in the same caste are competing for control of their jati—for a commonly claimed piece of land, for instance, or for redress of grievances such as the failure to pay a debt or the destruction of property.

The most extensive and binding of the factional alliances are based on the ownership of land. Landowners control the production and distribution of grain, the primary source of wealth in a village. For many landholding families, this type of control is minimal since they own an average of one-and-a-half acres. But those who have large holdings of land employ others in the village to do the tilling and harvesting in exchange for a fixed portion of the harvest. This system of patronage, which eliminates the need for any money, is called the *jajmani* system.

This patronage system includes some villagers who perform services according to the traditional occupation of their jati. Thus, a carpenter, weaver, washerman, or sweeper may also do jobs on a regular basis for a landowner for a portion of the harvest each year. Some may perform other services as well. A barber not only shaves his patron (*jajman*), but he is also traditionally expected to serve as the intermediary in negotiations which arrange for prospective brides for the patron's sons. Since no money is involved in any of the services, an employee tends to enter into a permanent relationship with a particular family or group of families. He will perform his service for them whenever it is needed and receive in return a continuous allotment of grain. Such relationships are often passed on from one generation to another.

These bonds are based on the yields of crops which are produced in the village fields, but they go far beyond the economic service involved. These relationships form a

complex web of obligations and supports, and the potential power of a large landowner at the top can be very great indeed.

In a typical agricultural village, several large landowning families which belong to the same *jati* will dominate the life of the village by maintaining an extensive faction of patronage relationships with members of several other caste *jatis*. Their joint family structure and common *jati* identity are strong, traditional forces which hold the leadership of the village together. But their continuing dominance depends on what their lands yield and on the factional ties of allegiance they are able to maintain. Given this importance, their ownership and control of land can become a source of severe and sometimes open conflict between these families and even between members of the same family. Their use of their factions in these disputes sometimes involves large segments of the village. Normally, because there are no structural supports for a faction other than the allegiance of those who belong to it, factions are cohesive, rather than disruptive, forces. Unless a landowner can count on wide support, his only course is to avoid any dispute.

The unity of the village is thus maintained by three interacting structures: the extended family, the *jati* community, and the factions. Each draws the villagers together in a different way, contributing to the village as a cohesive and stable social unit.



MODERNIZATION IN THE VILLAGE

Modern technology has come to the village. New high-yielding strains of grain, fertilizer, and electrically-powered water pumps have brought more food, employment, and hope to the villages. Schools have been built, and teachers are now ranked among the leading citizens of the village. Literacy and basic skills of farm and home management are taught to an increasing number of village children, and some of them will continue their studies in college and take an active role in developing the urban and industrial life of their nation.

Crowded buses now rumble along an extensive network of rural highways, bringing inexpensive transport within easy reach of many villagers. They provide ready access to markets, urban employment, and new ideas. Bicycles, rare forty years ago, are now a common sight along village lanes. Changes are taking place.

But these changes occur within patterns which have been established for generations and according to cultural norms which have evolved through the centuries. Factional politics as well as non-violent protest are both an integral part of the life in modern South Asia. Interaction and modification characterize the modern village scene. There is a resilience and adaptability to the traditions of village life.

The most intense challenge of the modern era has been the rapid increase in population. It has heightened the importance of the traditional factional groupings in the village. As the

population has increased, greater demands have been placed on the land, and more power has come to those who control the distribution of its produce. Faction leaders have thus acquired a stronger role, with greater opportunity to enforce their dominance among the villagers. The population challenge has forced existing social structures to respond. Insofar as these structures prove adequate to the challenge, they are being strengthened.

Other modern forces have been less intense and demanding, but they have become just as involved in the village's traditional patterns. Where technological advances have coincided with these traditions, they have been widely adopted, and their impact has been both helpful and constructive. But where such innovations directly challenged the accepted village norms, the results have not been so positive. Change, no matter how dramatic, has rarely happened outside the limits of accepted village norms.

One example of an attempt to institute reform by direct confrontation was a national scheme to introduce cooperative farming. Adopted by the government of India in its Community Development Project, this plan encouraged the formation of common ownership and cultivation of village lands. The program received funds in each of the first three Five Year Plans.

As a policy, cooperative farming appeared to be a much needed innovation. It would consolidate landholdings, usually small and fragmented, into more rational economic units. It would create opportunity for more expert and better-trained management, more efficient farm machinery, rotation of crops, and agricultural research. Its social implications also looked promising. Building upon a widely-recognized sense of village identity, cooperative farms would increase villagers' sense of participation in the life and welfare of the community as a whole. It was believed that sharing the land and its produce could only stimulate a greater feeling of equality and mutual help. The project thus appeared to be an

effective means to overcome the factional and jati divisions within the village. It looked like a good instrument for social reform.

But the record of the cooperative farm program in India did not sustain this promise. In many instances, it was never even tried because of rivalries between different arms of the government itself. Where it was implemented, the results were far below the government's modest targets, achieving in some instances less than twenty-five percent of the original goal. As a national policy, it has been abandoned.

There are a number of factors which contributed to the program's failure. The economic goal of land consolidation was misdirected. It aimed at greater efficiency, not the highest possible yield per acre. Yields do not depend upon the size of the plots used. In fact, research indicates that per-acre yields are greater on smaller lots. The goal of greater efficiency encouraged the use of more labor-saving machinery. But labor-saving devices did not solve the problem of rural unemployment. What was needed were more jobs for the landless villagers—not less.

The cooperative farming project was also doomed as an instrument of social reform. Its attempt to overcome the divisions and inequalities of the village factions and the jati social structure, even in the name of village solidarity, negated the very social groupings which embodied the traditional sense of village unity. Without the interaction provided by the factions and the jati hierarchy, there was no cohesive force in the village upon which a cooperative could be formed. The tradition of the village simply had no way of allowing a cooperative farm to happen.

As a result of the failure of the cooperative farm experiment, the Community Development Project has changed its approach. It now assigns advisors to live and work with the cultivators in the villages. These workers are trained to provide advice and encouragement in order to help the villagers overcome their financial, agricultural, and market-

ing problems on the local level. The advisors' work has been quiet and, in some instances, heroic. Where they are successful, they do bring modern technology and government services to meet the needs of each village.

But, again, their impact has its limits. As government workers these advisors come from the outside into an already complex and cohesive social system. Their presence can appear both awkward and suspicious. They accomplish most when they win the confidence of the village leaders, but in so doing, their know-how goes to strengthen the position of those already in dominance. The technological improvements, credit facilities, and marketing advantages which the workers bring do not produce any appreciable reform in the social structure. Modernization tends to favor those who have the traditional authority and skill to exercise village leadership. Those who gain the least are those already disadvantaged within the traditional social patterns of the village.

This process of change was described by an American observer returning after eighteen years to a small North Indian village. The changes he found were substantial. But he saw them as occurring within the established structural patterns of the village. Even the initial step of change was based on the traditional requirement that one's marriage partner come from another village:

In 1962 an important event occurred. A farmer moved into the village who had never lived there before—a relative by marriage of some people who had lived there before. He was an ex-landowner from another part of the district and he bought about ten acres of land.

He had tried some improved seeds and new fertilizer in 1961 in his own village. In 1962 he tried it in his new village and it was quite successful. The next year eight or ten other farmers tried it, and they too were successful. By 1964 everybody was falling over himself to get the new seeds and new fertilizers.

The demonstration by one villager who had taken the initiative was extremely convincing.

Their production has gone up—they saw they were getting twice what they were getting before—and they are certainly getting more than twice the money because prices have been rising all along. The price is about three times what it was.

There are no empty fields these days. You see standing crops and people weeding and watering these crops. Labor is now being imported into the village. I met one farmer looking around in the city trying to find somebody to bring back. He wanted to start a new tubewell and needed several laborers but could not find anybody in the village.

The village has increased in population. It now has about forty percent more people than it had eighteen years ago. These are partly relatives, partly immigrants. More children have grown up but infant mortality is still extremely high and medical services have not improved.

The village headman is the one who came in and tried the new seed. He has completely, almost singlehandedly abolished the factions in the village, because he has so much largesse to give out.

He was elected to the panchayat (village council) and when the village common lands were turned over to the panchayat there was a lot of land to sell. He gave them out to people who then became members of his faction. He sold them at low rates to the low castes and Muslims.

He put in quite a few paved streets and built a school. He has pleased people and they are eating out of his hand, not in a dependent way—he has just got a good political base. The other faction really does not exist any more. There are a few discontented people, but they are doing quite well with their grinding mills and machinery. They simply do not have the land base that he has for power.

There is an awareness that there is something

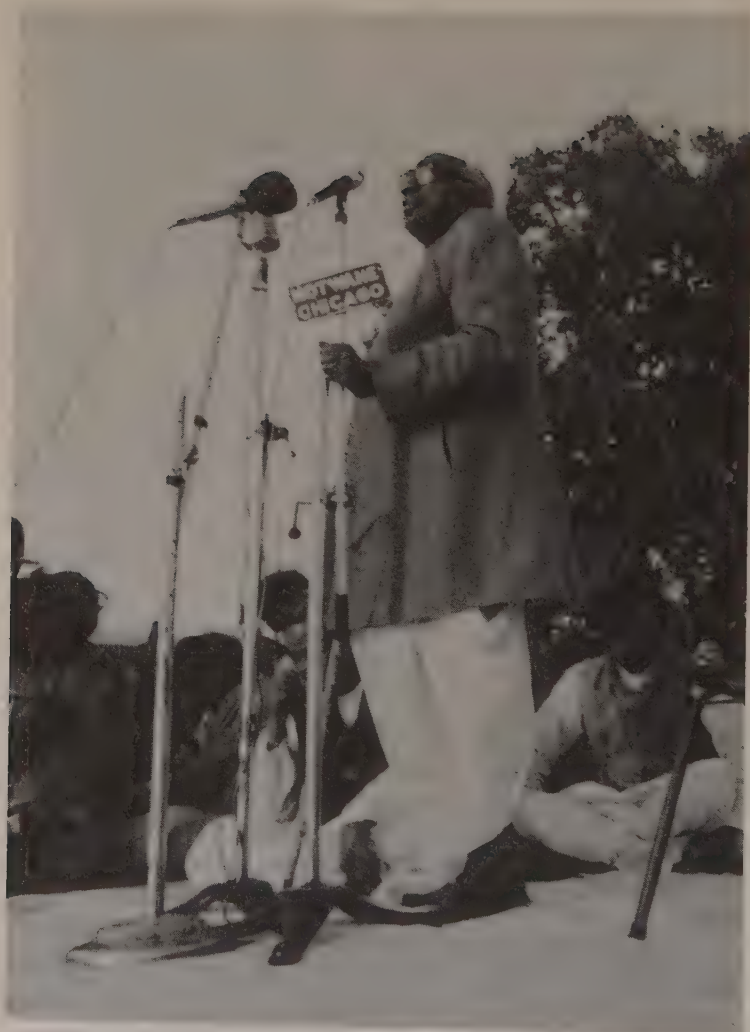
important in the village, an awareness of how customs differ from other peoples, an acceptance of urban standards as different from village standards, and a sense that the two ought to be and are related. New things are coming in and there is local creativity.

A lot of this seems to have happened on its own power. The old society seems to have stepped up pretty much on the initiative of its own leadership, with a couple of new ideas here and there. It is a demonstration that it can work when people take over.³

The ballot box has been one of the most significant instruments of change in the villages of India. The Constitution of 1950 established for every adult citizen the right to vote for candidates for public office. The Panchayat Acts, passed in the state legislatures during the 1950s, established an elected council of five members, called the panchayat, as the governing body in many villages. Democratic elections have become the method for determining village leadership, and they have changed the style of village politics.

Even with the vital changes in the political process which the ballot box introduced, the existing village faction and jati structures still provide the most useful and natural groupings upon which to build support for public office. These traditional social structures have become the base for voting blocks supporting those candidates who best represent the groups' interests. Jati communities have begun organizing themselves politically on village and district levels, as do ethnic and minority interest groups within our own political parties. Without these alliances, a democratically-elected, representative government might not ever have received wide acceptance and participation among such a diverse, fragmented, and largely illiterate population.

Factional leaders have dominated the polls: They have simply converted their traditional claims of patronal allegiance to support for political office. Once elected, they use their office to protect their traditional prerogatives and



(United Nations photo/J.P. Laffont.)

Politicians such as Jag Jivan Ram, shown here addressing a political meeting, are discovering that in order to gain the support they need to win general elections, they have to appeal to members of many jatis and many villages.

interests. Strong faction leaders, for example, have been effective in weakening many of the laws which have sought to encourage more equitable land distribution. By virtue of their elected office, they can oppose any limitation of their landholdings, for such limitations would reduce their economic strength and the base of their political power. When the new panchayat has worked to the benefit of the whole village, it is because of the enlightened policy of a faction leader. The above example of the new village leader is a case in point: By successfully introducing new ideas and methods, he created a faction of his own.

Yet the democratic process is also having its effect on faction leadership. Because of the broad base of support that faction leaders need to get elected, it makes them more responsive to the needs and conflicting interests of other communities within the villages. This responsiveness will increase as the power of the vote becomes better understood by those on the lower levels of the jati hierarchy.

The traditional jati structure is also responding to the ballot box, having its greatest impact in elections above the village level. Candidates for district, state, and national office require the support of more voters than even the most dominant village faction can muster. Because the jatis extend through several neighboring villages, they have provided the basis for political alliances needed to rally support for a single candidate over a wide region. Members of a jati have sought out their caste counterparts in other villages and formed associations to represent their interests in state and national legislatures. These caste associations have become a part of the Indian political scene, serving as lobbies when members have not been able to elect their own representatives to public office.

Because these new associations are geographically spread out and politically-based, their bonds are looser than the kinship ties on which they have been built. But since they do incorporate traditional social relationships, they have greater

unity and stability than alliances formed only for political purposes. The jati system has provided an effective base for the orderly conduct of democratic elections and representative government. Village tradition has thus become an effective means to introduce a new form of political activity.

This involvement of the jati system in the democratic process also influences the types of issues that are handled by the government. By becoming politically active, regional landholding jati associations have been able to block state-wide legislative action on some of the most difficult village problems: unemployment, the inequities of wealth and privilege, and landowner-laborer relations. These issues have been left largely unresolved. Disputes between landowners and laborers, for example, are still resolved mostly by force.

Village politics, factional alliances, and the jati structure effectively function on the national level as well. The interaction between traditional politics and the more abstract structures of the Constitution is an important aspect of Indian public life today. The situation will become more intense as new leaders rise to national prominence and participate in the decisions of national government. Most of the national leadership during the post-independence years were schooled in Western political philosophy and British parliamentary procedure. The new leaders have developed their prowess in the political arena of the village factions. The old leaders based their success on their support of the most advantageous or productive issues in a campaign. The success of the new leaders is based on their ability to function within the traditional social groups as they adapt to new political realities.

Hope that an agreement can be reached between the new politics and the traditional social structure is part of the democratic process itself. The process makes the government answerable to the local arena. The adaptability of village traditions also suggests that local politics will continue to

adjust to democratization. This movement on both sides can be seen throughout India. The effective exercise of democracy within traditional patterns is a significant and widespread evolution, and it appears that it will continue to develop.

But this is not the whole story. In other places, the landless and the poor have yet to receive the benefits of political power. They express an uneasiness and dissatisfaction with the present process of change. Some have been able to demand collectively a greater share of the increasing agricultural produce which the new technology is providing. But where they have been most effective, friction with the landholding jatis has developed, and the orderly processes of society have given way to violence. These tensions will increase as these groups become larger and better organized and as their expectations for fulfillment rise.

An indication of this uneasiness is recorded in a simple village song, translated by an American student working in a school committed to the non-violent teachings of Gandhi. He writes:

At the school there is much singing, particularly in the evening before we all go to sleep and the jackals in the forest begin their night laughter. To sing here is important. Children learn folksongs before they learn to count. As my Hindi gets better, I've begun to translate some of these. There is one that had particular interest for me because despite all their talk of non-violence it shows the reverse anger which is still in many of these people. It is called "The Other Side" and they teach it to their kids. It goes:

O God, what is in your blind world!

In one side . . .

I saw ruined huts.

And in the other side . . .

Silken curtains hanging on one man's door.

In the one side . . .

I saw broken beams and earthen walls.

In the other side . . .

O God there were high buildings with electric
bulbs burning all around.

In one side . . .

More ruined and damaged huts.

In the other side . . .

There were buildings like castles with all people
in beautiful and charming dress.

In one side . . .

A naked boy and girl.

O God, what is on the other side?⁴

The orderly growth and stability of India today is due in many ways to the depth and strength of its traditional structures. At the same time we can sense that India's historic patterns and norms have yet to resolve many of the challenges presented by the modernization that is taking place in the village.



RELIGION IN THE VILLAGE

During a recent early spring, the governing council of the city of Madurai in South India was faced with a difficult political problem. The source of the problem was the failure of the rains during the previous two autumn monsoon seasons. The city was in the midst of a severe drought. Hospital services were curtailed and irrigation cut off. There was a desperate need for water. The council urgently desired to do all that it could to meet this situation—but without rain there was little that it *could* do.

The public somehow held the council responsible for this plight. Classical tradition had long affirmed that the natural as well as the social condition of the people is the legitimate responsibility of the political leadership. It is believed that a good ruler, by his righteousness, is able to enlist the cooperation of the elements in providing for the welfare of his subjects. In this instance, suspicion arose that the council had done something wrong, and that the city would be in the grasp of the drought until it had made amends.

The act for which popular sentiment held the council accountable was unusual. Several years before, in anticipation of a state visit, the council had turned around a large stone statue of an elephant, which stood in a town park, so that it faced the open square. The council had felt that its triumphant trunk was a more appropriate aspect for the visiting dignitaries than its imposing rear. Unfortunately this move also turned the stone elephant toward the temple to the

goddess Meenakshi, which stands four blocks away at the very center of the city. The elephant was then posed to attack the temple rather than protect it. As the drought continued, the people became more convinced that the goddess Meenakshi was displeased with the change in the elephant's position and was withholding the rains from the city to express her displeasure.

The council was faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, it did not want to encourage the expression of popular religious belief as a significant factor in the administration of government. It was committed to secular rule, capable of serving all elements of the society, instead of catering to the sentiments of any particular religious group. On the other hand, the elephant-has-caused-the-drought feeling represented the convictions of the people the council had been elected to serve.

The solution was to arrange for street workers to go during the night, under the cover of darkness, to reverse the position of the elephant. The feelings of the people were respected, but in a way that caused as little public notice as possible. This procedure alleviated possible friction among religious groups and disassociated the council from the act. On the following morning, people entering the square simply found the elephant facing the other way. Beginning that very day, during a season when it rarely rains in South India, it rained in the city of Madurai for a week.

The religious faith of the people of South Asia is evident everywhere. Five times each day, even in the most remote villages of Afghanistan, one hears the call to daily prayer announced from the minaret of mosques. In Sri Lanka, one sees Buddhist monks with their begging bowls making their daily round for food. Burning incense, jasmine petals, chanting, and the rapid beating of drums fill the air.

Many diverse religious objects adorn a typical Indian village. Its paths are lined with shrines of various shapes and sizes, ranging from polished stones decorated with garlands



(United Nations photo.)

Monuments to the different faiths of the South Asian peoples can be found throughout the villages of the area. This Siva Temple stands in South India, near Tanjore in Madras.

to trees surrounded by wrought iron fences of snakes, to ornately carved temple gateways. All of these objects proclaim a powerful but mysterious presence which is recognized and honored by the villagers in acts of respect, prayer, and worship.

Households abound with ceremonies. Some are ornate, like a wedding or the annual family rite in memory of a deceased father. Some are very simple: A landless laborer makes a plea for work by cracking a coconut before a crudely formed mud image of the elephant-headed god Ganapati, the remover of obstacles. The preparation of a meal, the devotion of a wife, and the attentiveness of a daughter-in-law may all be acts of worship expressed in the daily round of activities to honor a deity's blessing. When a host responds to a visitor's expression of thanks by saying, "It is my duty," the host means that he did not receive the visitor in order to gain favor or make the visitor beholden to him. The host accepts his guest as a religious act in the sincere faith that every guest brings to his home an intimation of the divine.

Much of the religious activity in the village is in response to the recurring crises which inevitably visit all homes: accidents, losses, disease, hunger, hostility, and death. These crises are understood on the simplest level as the work of unknown evil spirits or an uncompromising fate.

The people feel it is necessary to avert the anger of these forces, and the most important figure on this level of religious concern is the *shaman*. He or she is a person periodically possessed by a special power, through which it is believed the evil spirit can be identified and the appropriate means by which it can be placated or deterred can be disclosed.

The shaman does not normally acquire a religious role by birth or profession. Rather, he discovers through a unique experience—a trance or a vision—that he is endowed with powers to cope, if not with the calamity itself, at least with the emotional needs of those who experience it. He may first serve as an apprentice with an established shaman and later

gather a clientele whom he serves whenever called upon. But his religious authority depends on his ability to identify the source of evil and respond with an appropriate remedy. Insofar as the shaman succeeds, he remains an effective emissary of sacred power and has the ability to avert or control evil in the lives of the village people.

On a more formal level of religious expression, appeals are made to specific deities to avert misfortune. Small shrines to these deities are placed along the roadway or in the village temple. Special ceremonies are performed in them regularly to ward off the deities' demonic powers. For example, rites are offered to the goddess of smallpox in some villages at a set time of the year. These rites are an integral part of the village festival calendar.

The traditional character and regularity of village festivals lead us to another level of religious awareness. In these festive annual events, which are celebrated by everyone in the village—whatever their faith—all of the villagers gain and affirm their sense of an ordered and benevolent rhythm of the natural world. The purpose of the festival rites is to allow them to enter into an established, pre-ordained pattern. The celebration centers around the reenactment of a mythological story which recalls a sacred act performed at and on behalf of the village. These myth ceremonies occur at specific times each year to renew the benefit of acts of grace performed by past heroes, saints, or gods. A villager does not change the course of this divine activity but, rather, participates in it so that he may share in the bounty of its beneficent power. The elaborate cycle of ceremonies associated with planting and the harvest are examples of this type of religious activity.

There are a large number of festivals celebrated each year. These are drawn from the calendars of the various religious communities—whether Muslim, Christian, or Hindu—represented in the village. Each has its own set and sequence of ceremonies, special foods, or specific members of the

family who participate. A ceremony may be very simple. In one, only the mother of the family fasts all day and goes outside after dark to look at the moon through a sieve before rejoining her family at dinner. The purpose of this rite is to assure the long life of her husband.

Other festivals are national, like our Thanksgiving or summer holidays, which are celebrated in distinctive ways in different parts of the country. But everyone participates in some way or another. Deepvali, or the "Festival of Lights," is celebrated in November by decorating houses with rows of tiny lamps, and lighting firecrackers throughout the night. During the day members of the family exchange gifts of new clothes.

An even more colorful celebration is the Festival of Holi, a spring rite celebrated widely throughout northern India. Children run through the streets spraying red dye on anyone within range. Wives taunt their husbands, and everyone dances or sings in the streets.

Another widely celebrated festival is called Dasahra ("Ten Days"), or Navaratri ("Nine Nights"). It reenacts the mythological battle and final victory of Rama, the divine hero of India's great epic the *Ramayana*. In this myth Rama conquers Ravana, a demonic king who abducted Rama's wife, Sita. During late September or early October, large papier mache figures of these two antagonists and their companies of heroes are made in Delhi, and the battle is reenacted on the great *maidan* (parade ground) before the Red Fort. The festival ends with the figure of Ravana and his cohorts being blown up by explosives planted inside the papier mache figures.

The attending crowds are more festive and jovial than we would expect at a religious ceremony. There is little reverence or awe. The ceremony simply celebrates the victory of good in the universe over the forces of evil. Rama's victory is assured, and so the people enjoy it. They are reassured in their faith that whatever may occur to them in the future, the

ultimate victory is with Rama and the forces of good arrayed on his side.

The celebration of the theme of good triumphing over evil is evident in many other festivals held at different times of year in various villages of India. This type of festival occurs especially during the late fall months, when the course of the sun moves closer to the southern horizon. The people then celebrate the efforts of the gods to bring it back to the center of the sky.

Another type of festival which occurs in temples, mosques, and shrines throughout South Asia is the celebration of the birthday or martyrdom of a saint or god. These events are understood as sacred acts in which the people participate by their annual reenactment. The sacred wedding festivals in South India during the fallow spring months are particularly popular and colorful. In them the traditional wedding ceremony is actually performed, formally reuniting the temple icons in marriage. This rite provides a divine prototype for the people. Their own marriages are made more sacred by the example of the gods.

There is a third level of religious expression in the Indian village, distinct from the crisis-oriented practice of the shaman and the more traditional patterns and corporate activity in the festivals. This third type is identified in elaborate sacrificial rites over which the traditional priests, the Brahmins, preside.

Many of these rituals are performed in the home, such as the initiation ceremony, called *upanayanam*, performed for higher caste boys around the age of puberty. Sacrificial rituals also form a part of the temple festivals. Festivals usually last for several days and involve a special, traditional role for almost every member of the village: as musicians, temple cart pullers, or patrons of particular parts of the ceremonies. But the central event of the celebration is an elaborate series of religious acts performed by the priesthood. These rituals involve the pouring or placing of

symbolic elements into a sacred fire—elements such as water, specially prepared butter (called *ghee*), grains, seeds, or rice—all in a highly intricate sequence. These acts are performed according to manuals of ritual which are centuries old and are the special preserve of the priesthood. They are accompanied by the recitation of India's most ancient and sacred literature, the hymns of the *Rig Veda*.

The reverence and sense of awe which these rituals stir among the people is immense. During the final hours of such a ceremony, the crowds press in on all sides as the most sacred moments of the ceremony are performed. Sacred power is here not being placated, nor celebrated, but created before the eyes of the devout beholders.

Part of the sacredness of this ritual is identified with the priest. Its effectiveness depends both on his long instruction in the intricacy of its performance and his sacred purity. He maintains his purity by adhering to a distinct and rigid set of religious and social practices which characterize Brahmin orthodoxy. The priest maintains a vegetarian diet and performs a number of cleansing rituals in his daily household rites. He may also practice austerities and meditation to enhance his religious understanding and purity. By these acts his authority is enhanced, and the high ranking of the Brahmin community in the social hierarchy of the village is affirmed.

More important to the power of the sacrificial rite is the symbolic content of the sacrifice itself. The sacred power, called Brahman, which is generated in the performance of the ritual, is identified in the ancient religious tradition of India with the transcendent power which creates and sustains the entire universe. The ritual act points to a level of experience which relates to a transcending sense of reality.

The same stream of life that runs through my veins
night and day runs through the world and dances in
rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment. ⁵

Rabindranath Tagore, "Gitanjali," LXIX



THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

Great respect is given to all religious people in South Asia—whether it be a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka, a mullah in Pakistan, a Brahmin priest, a Sufi mystic, a wandering mendicant, or an ascetic yogi in a mountain retreat. All of them command a certain authority and deference because of their commitment to the religious life, and they continue to have a significant place in the public life of the South Asian people.

The source of this authority lies in the traditions of South Asia's past. The distinctive role of the Brahmin priest, which accounts for the high social rank held by the Brahmin community today, goes back to the rustic courts of the tribal princes during the early Vedic Aryan period, between 1500 and 500 B.C. During this period, the Brahmins' function was to establish an unchallenged religious authority for their leaders. The princes depended upon the sacred power which their priest could command in order to rule successfully over both their subjects and their rivals.

To fulfill this function, the priests gathered many popular and courtly religious practices into a complex series of rituals to consecrate their leader, to promote his rule, and to celebrate his achievements. Ceremonies of coronation involved the use of sacred water, those of welfare used an intoxicating plant called soma, and those of victory used the sacrifice of a stallion. All served to express the sacred power with which the king ruled. The priests traced the king's power to the deities or the religious powers with whom they, as priests, were identified. Thus, very early in the course of

India's history, the priests assumed an important place in the maintenance of social order and welfare.

The priests' position was further enhanced by the deepening awareness of the relationship between the authority of their king and the cosmic power which created the universe. The connection between these two forces—royal authority and creative power—was the Brahman, the holy power of sacrifice itself.

The original act of creation is celebrated in a series of later hymns in the *Rig Veda*, a collection probably compiled in the form in which we now have it about 1000 B.C. Hymn 90 in the Tenth Book describes the entire universe as having initially been embodied within an ideal, archetypal figure of man called Purusha:

The Purusha alone is all this universe, what has been,
what is to be . . . A quarter of him is all beings, three-
quarters are the immortal in heaven.

The sacrifice of this heavenly, archetypal figure is what caused the creation of the world. Different objects in the universe then became the symbolic representations of specific parts of his sacrificial body:

The moon sprang from his mind, the sun was produced
from his eye.

Significantly, the earliest statement of the traditional varna scale is found in this hymn. This scale ranks society into four hereditary groupings in order of precedence as: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (rulers), Vaisyas (citizens), and Sudras (laborers). In this ancient account, the Brahmins are portrayed as Purusha's spokesmen, his mouth; the rulers are his arms; the citizens, merchants, and landowners are his legs; and the laborers are portrayed as his feet.

The hierarchical character of this ranking, a fundamental assumption of Indian society, is quite distinct from our own assumption that all men are created equal. It asserts that the

structure of an ordered society ought to be built upon the premise that among men there is a wide discrepancy in both potential and opportunity, that man lives in greater harmony and has greater opportunity to fulfill himself when he accepts the stratified circumstances, both social and natural, into which he has been born.

Our belief in the equality of all men is based, as illustrated in the Declaration of Independence, upon a religious-cultural premise: "All men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." In India, the social ranking of the caste system is based on the sacred authority of this Vedic hymn. According to the hymn, the high position of the Brahmin community is established in the very sacrifice of the Purusha which created the order of all things in the world. Because of this religious basis, it is important to distinguish between this ancient varna scale and the jati structure which holds kinship groups in a stratified order in the village.

The two systems involve different concepts of the essential units of social grouping. The varna scale divides society into five groups (with the addition of the untouchables as a separate group below the traditional four) which are determined largely by the ritual purity of their social function, as illustrated by the placement of the priestly community at the top. The jati system describes the positioning of a large number of extended kinship groups. This ranking usually involves around twenty jatis in a single village, but could involve more than three thousand such groups throughout the subcontinent.

There is also a difference in the standards for ranking between the varna and jati systems. The varna scale places the wielders of religious power at the top and promotes as its highest value a life of discipline, asceticism, and poverty. The jati scale gives priority to those communities which control the life of the village: The highest rank is held by those who dominate.

The continuous ranking of the Brahmin community at the

top of both scales illustrates how the norms of the classical tradition vitally enter into village life. The priest's superior position on the varna scale was long ago superimposed on the jati structure with such authority that this structure also affirms the honor due to Brahmins as a significant factor in the stability and welfare of the village as a whole. But the ranks of the groups in the jati system beneath the Brahmins do not correspond so clearly with the varna scale. The larger number of jatis exhibit greater flux among themselves than the fivefold division of the varna scale would indicate.

Studies of jati structure in the village do reveal a general fourfold division. These divisions tend to group together the Brahmin and landowning jatis on the highest rank. Next below them are the high or clean craft jatis, which correspond to the upper portion of the *Sudra* or laborer caste (which are actually on the fourth level of the varna scale). Next are the low or unclean craft jatis, which are also *Sudra*. And lowest are the outcaste, untouchable jatis.

The varna scale is also used by non-Brahmin jatis when they hold a position of dominance in their village. In order to strengthen their position the jatis advance a claim to a past Kshatriya (royal) varna rank. It is difficult for them to substantiate this claim either by tradition or heredity. The claim is based instead on where they feel their jati should align on the varna scale. The mobility of any jati involves this process. The jati declares a position of higher rank in the village hierarchy based on a claimed rank on the varna scale. Traditionally non-Brahmin jati communities have even achieved Brahmin rank by carefully imitating the social practices expected of the Brahmins.

There is evidence to suggest that this use of the varna scale has long been practiced. None of the great imperial dynasties of India, for example, were of royal background. The Mauryan emperors once belonged to the *Sudra* (laborer) caste level, and the Guptas were from the merchant level. These rulers' claim to Kshatriya rank thus appears to have

been the result of their acquisition of imperial power, not its cause.

The lack of direct correspondence between the varna scale and the actual social ranking among the jatis has not diminished the importance of this traditional scale in the village. Even the tradition of the varna itself was not conceived to be a factual description of what the world was actually like. Its authority, rather, rested on its ability to reveal the sacred reality from which all creation springs, the cosmic sacrifice of the archetypal Purusha.

In the classical period of Indian civilization this sacred fourfold order was greatly elaborated in a series of treatises called *Dharmasastras*, or law books. These texts developed an elaborate system of appropriate behavior for each of the four castes in such a way that the hierarchical ranking among them was both visible and assured.

The greatest of these texts is called the *Law of Manu*, and dates from around the third century A.D. It begins with a description of creation, affirming the religious basis of the fourfold rank. It maintains this explicit gradation by setting forth specific rules of conduct for the vital stages in the life of the top three castes. This distinction is most obvious in terms of the punishment designated for the same offense: When a Brahmin commits a crime against a laborer, for example, he receives a reprimand, whereas a laborer may receive death if he offends a Brahmin.

The *Law of Manu* differentiates between the stages in a man's life and distinguishes between the appropriate behavior expected for each of them. These stages, called *ashramas*, are: student, householder, mendicant, and ascetic. Each stage lasts twenty-five years in an ideal life of one hundred. The rules concerning celibacy are one example of the difference between stages. Celibacy is to be strictly maintained during the first (the student) and last two (the mendicant and ascetic) stages. But one is not expected to be celibate during the second (or householder) stage. One is

also only expected to be a provider during the stage of householding. Thus, a person acts according to two sets of rules: those appropriate to rank, which are established by birth; and those appropriate to life stage, which are determined by age.

There are other variables built into the system, including a special set of rules to cover adversity and distress. All add to the complexity of the system, but they also make it more comprehensive and workable by avoiding the rigidity of a social system that assumes a common behavior for all people, whatever their age and walk of life.

This comprehensive structure is an impressive intellectual accomplishment. It reveals an awareness of what happens in the everyday world, but it also reveals that the classical scholar-priests who composed these treatises did not seek in natural behavior a consistent basis for social order. They had too strong a sense of the flux and uncertainty of normal human experience. Order was, therefore, sought in abstract, intellectual patterns—patterns which had their prototype in the ritual of the Vedic sacrifice. It was through such analyses that Indian civilization contributed the concept of the number “zero” to our mathematical system. The Greek and Roman number systems had no such concept: for them, if it was not there, it could not be counted.

The *Law of Manu* is but one of several examples in the classical tradition of such intellectual analyses. The *Arthashastra* is a treatise on the art of statecraft. It builds its analysis on the assumption that a king has no other source of power than the exercise of his own authority. It sets forward an extensive set of rules for the orderly maintenance of a kingdom, in what must be one of mankind’s greatest literary monuments to political pragmatism.

Poetics is another area which is described with extensive precision in the classical period. Literary works are classified according to the dominant emotion which the poet communicates to his audience. The merit of the poet’s work

is determined by his ability to combine image and sound in order to refine that emotion into an expression of beauty. The list of such analyses would also include treatises on art, music, and philosophy.

Of all the accomplishments of abstract elaboration in the classical tradition, none is greater than the earliest: the analysis of the structure of language by the classical grammarians. Their skill almost literally created the classical language called "Sanskrit."

The word *sanskrita* means "made together, formed, or perfected." As a language, it is formed according to precise, elaborate, and consistent patterns of linguistic structure. The analyses of these patterns evolved over a long period of time and reflect the great concern on the part of the traditional priesthood to preserve the precise recitation of the *Rig Veda* hymns used in the sacrifice. These analyses were collected into a single formulation by the grammarian Panini, who probably lived during the fourth century B.C. His analysis of language led to an ingenious and highly effective description of how all language—even computer language—functions.

Panini's concern was to analyze how sounds, as the basic structural units of a language, fit together to form a word or a sentence. Only specific combinations of sounds form words, and specific combinations of words form sentences. Words and sentences thus have their own patterns of use and consistency. These patterns are related to what the speaker experiences, but they are determined by the structure of the language itself. Panini was not concerned about how particular words express a particular meaning (which is to some degree arbitrary and constantly changing). The permanent structures in language were what he sought to describe.

The result of Panini's analysis of language was a profound understanding of its structure, which he codified into a set of rules for the use of Sanskrit. So complete was this analysis that he halted any changes in its form. Sanskrit had reached its perfection as a linguistic system. Such an accomplishment

ranks Panini among the greatest of the world's ancient scholars, one whose insights are still being discovered and appreciated.

The explorations of the scholar-priests into the abstract structures of human experience which produced these social, political, aesthetic, and linguistic treatises are a vital part of the South Asian heritage. The treatises discussed here represent only a few of many classical works which include literary, artistic, and philosophical masterpieces as well. The Sanskrit poems of Kalidasa, the philosophy of Sankara, and the tranquility portrayed in the sculpture of the seated Buddha of Sarnath are among the finest endeavors the human imagination has produced.

A more subtle impact of the classical tradition on contemporary South Asia is the concept of symbol. Symbols are not unknown to us. Words are symbols. They are sounds and letters. They are things. But when they take on the structure and the meaning of a word, they are more than just a sound—they become that which they refer to and represent. They become symbols.

As symbols, words are much more complex than sounds. The word "tree" is limited because it refers to a specific group of things: trees. But at the same time the word is open-ended because it includes every possible member of that group, real or imagined. We do not have to see a tree to know what the word means. The word itself communicates the concept of a "tree." A word thus makes real for us any object which it represents, of which it is a symbol.

We use words as symbols all the time. We also use a symbol when we salute the flag to identify our allegiance to our country. Symbols happen whenever objects—words, flags, crosses—express more to us than what they are as things.

The classical scholars of South Asia assumed that our greatest insights into the nature of reality are expressed in symbols rather than as facts. They were more interested in

words, for example, than they were in numbers—except the number zero, which is itself the most symbolic of numbers. Its reality is affirmed only by its figure. Its quantity simply is not there.

Because of this assumption, the classical scholars did not attempt to find objective validity for what they experienced, nor to see what made things work. They sought, rather, to discover in their experience the deepest level of meaning an object could express. They pursued that meaning to an affirmation of ultimate truth, the truth of reality.

This quest for the ultimate truth has taken many forms throughout the long history of Indian civilization. We have briefly traced it from celebration of the sacrifice and compassion for human misery to the abstract analysis of social behavior and language. The scholars of this tradition carried this pursuit even into the depths of human consciousness.



GANDHI AND THE MODERNIZATION OF SOUTH ASIA

We have explored the ways in which the countries of South Asia have sought to find their identities as modern democratic nations. The main impetus for this search is contained in the forces of modernization itself. Because an essential element of a democracy is self-determination, to be a modern democratic nation requires a shared sense of an authentic national identity among those who live in it.

We have seen that the peoples of South Asia have many sources of identity. Everyone has a religious identity, a language identity, a caste jati identity, and a village identity. All of these are given at birth, but a national identity is not. It has to be sought.

The process of indigenization has not been easy for most of the nations of South Asia. Three factors contribute to this difficulty.

First, there is an almost complete lack of correspondence between the political boundaries of these new nations and the more indigenous religious, linguistic, and geographic regions of the subcontinent. Only in Bhutan and Sri Lanka do they coincide. These two nations are predominantly Buddhist, are geographically isolated, and had a history as a people before becoming a modern nation. All of the other nations' borders were drawn to meet other criteria. It is typical yet ironic that the idea of creating a separate Muslim state in South Asia was originally advocated by a group seeking to protect those

Muslims who lived in areas where they were in a minority. Yet the nation of Pakistan was founded in those areas of the subcontinent where Muslims were in the majority.

The unrelated, indeed foreign, character of the national boundaries of the South Asian nations is only one of the difficulties in the search for a modern political identity. Even more challenging is the extensive pluralism which exists within any division of the subcontinent. Even in Sri Lanka and Bhutan, significant minorities have yet to find expression either in the process of self-discovery or in the working of a democracy. The Tamils of Sri Lanka and the Nepali in Bhutan, both of whom make up about twenty percent of the total populations of each country, are not going to disappear and will not be ignored as public participation in their governments increases. The same is true for the Hindi-speaking people of the Tarai in Nepal, who represent over thirty percent of the total population of that country.

The problem of pluralism increases where there is more than one significant minority in a country. The Pathans of Afghanistan and the Punjabis in Pakistan, who have a slight majority in these two countries, threaten the stability of these nations when they exclude the Uzbeks or the Baluchi from their vision of their national identity.

The third difficulty in the search for a national identity in South Asia is that political unification has been the exception rather than the rule in the long course of its history. The only historical precedent for a common government of large and diverse areas of the subcontinent has been under the reign of emperors who have imposed a unifying political structure from the top. The need for authoritarian leadership is still evident in the struggle to establish a modern political identity among the nations of South Asia. Hereditary monarchs and martial law continue. In the absence of any other basis for the stability of a nation, such authoritarian rule has become necessary. But it does not encourage the kind of public participation expected of a modern democracy.

The significance of Mahatma Gandhi is best understood in the light of these difficulties. Gandhi's achievement is that, in the face of these obstacles, he shaped for the people of India an effective awareness of their identity as a modern nation.

Gandhi achieved this vision because he understood the role of indigenization in establishing a viable democracy. He accepted the village as the primary unit of political identity for most of the people of South Asia. And he asserted that the extension of village identity to the national level must be accomplished both through linguistic identity with the mother tongue and through a living affirmation of the classical tradition.

Gandhi's understanding of the classical tradition was in many ways more intuitive than informed. He had never been trained in its intricacies. But he revealed both the specific content of the tradition and its emphasis on symbols. Becoming a free nation was, for example, more significant to him as a symbol of true freedom among the people than as a political fact.

This symbolic sense of becoming a nation is revealed in a series of acts which Gandhi designed to point beyond political autonomy to a sense of self-respect, moral responsibility, and social harmony. He promoted the spinning wheel as an act of political defiance to protest the economic control which the British exercised over Indian life. Local production of cotton thread would reduce the need to buy cloth produced in and imported from British mills. But spinning was also a symbolic act. Everyone could do it, irrespective of caste; it was productive, and it encouraged self-sufficiency. Spinning thus encouraged virtues which were as essential to India's independence as was freedom from British domination.

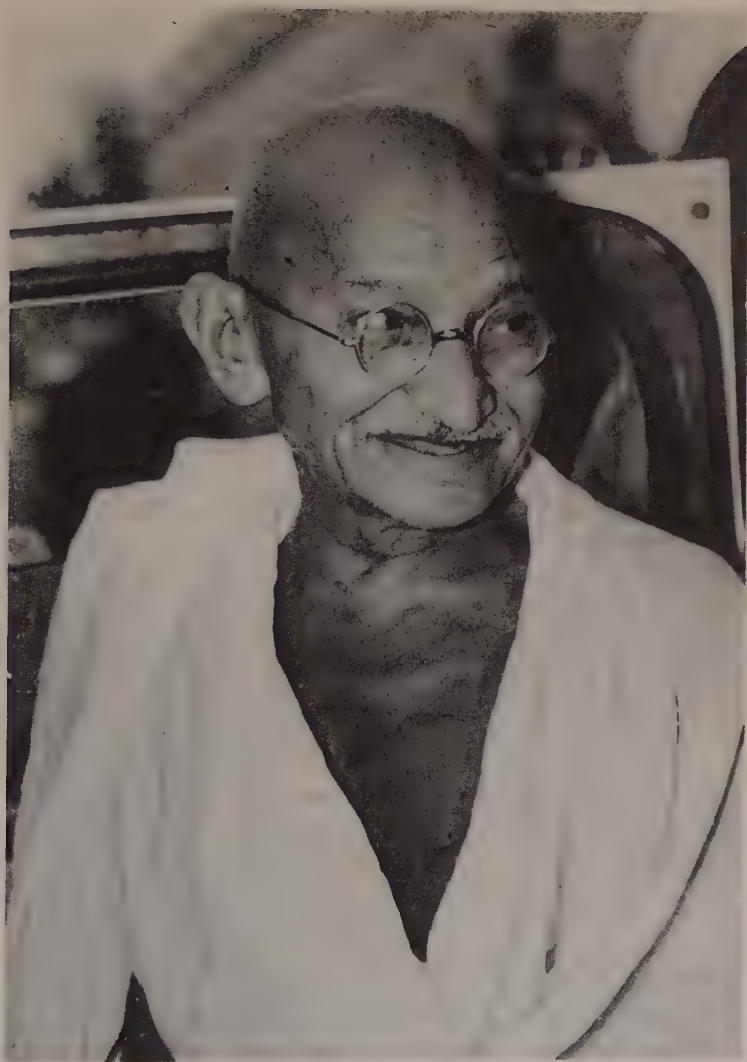
The protest Salt March of 1931 was Gandhi's most significant act of non-violent civil disobedience during the years leading up to India's independence. He led a procession of thousands to the ocean shore at Dandi to extract salt

from the sea. Because the British government was not able to tax salt that was not purchased, this act was for Gandhi an effective way to negate the salt taxes which the British had imposed on the Indian people, and thus to defy British rule. Because salt is used in every Indian household every day, the Salt March was also understood by all the people as an act of freedom from British rule. Like Gandhi's other protest campaigns, the march to Dandi called upon reserves of courage, discipline, and strength in the character of those who took part in it. The steady and non-violent determination of some twenty-five hundred volunteers in the concurrent act of public protest against the Darashna Salt Works revealed a capacity for independence with which everyone in the country could identify. Because these non-violent demonstrations had such symbolic content, Gandhi called them *satyagraha*, acts of truth.

An equally vital part of Gandhi's concept of freedom was the need for reform in Indian society. If India was to be truly free, the identity of all the people had to be respected. Reforms which would eliminate discrimination and subjection were necessary before a meaningful independence could occur. In particular, Gandhi was disturbed by the repression of the untouchable communities. He called it "the ulcer of untouchability"⁶ in Indian life.

His concern for the plight of the untouchables was demonstrated in many ways. He welcomed them into his *ashram*, the religious community of dedicated followers who lived with him, calling the untouchables *Harijans*, or children of God. He did not permit any form of discrimination by the ashram members. He insisted that the members all do such menial tasks as cleaning the lavatories which were set aside by the society at large for the untouchables to do. Gandhi also led a number of non-violent campaigns specifically to win entrance into Hindu temples for the untouchables.

Significantly, for all his concern with repression in Indian



(UPI photo.)

Gandhi's non-violent demonstrations helped free India from British rule. Today his methods are being used by oppressed peoples throughout the world.

society, Gandhi never advocated the elimination of the varna caste structure. He believed what needed to be reformed was the inequality in the jati system. Gandhi felt that the classical caste divisions were necessary to preserve the social stability, interdependence, and mutual concern essential to the working of a democracy. As he well knew from the amount of violence in peoples' lives everywhere, democracy cannot work in social anarchy. An indigenous structure is necessary to hold the people together. But he believed feelings of superiority and discrimination in that structure must be rooted out. The varna caste model, as the most appropriate expression of the classical ideal of social harmony, could therefore become the stabilizing structure for the working of democracy. As Gandhi once said:

I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration. But like every other institution, it has suffered from excrescences. I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural, and essential. The innumerable subcastes are sometimes a convenience, often a hindrance. The sooner there is fusion the better. The silent destruction and reconstruction of subcastes have ever gone on and is bound to continue. Social pressures and public opinion can be trusted to deal with the problem. But I am certainly against any attempt at destroying the fundamental divisions. The caste system is not based on inequality, there is no question of inferiority, and so far as there is any such question arising, the tendency should undoubtedly be checked. But there appears to be no valid reason for ending the system because of its abuse. It lends itself easily to reformation. The spirit of democracy, which is fast spreading throughout India and the rest of the world, will, without a shadow of a doubt, purge the institution of the idea of predominance and subordination. The spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by the abolition of forms. It requires a change of the heart.⁷

Gandhi's most important identification with the classical tradition was in his concept of dharma, the rules of behavior and the moral expectations of those who are called upon to lead.

From his childhood, Gandhi had expected to be a leader. His father was a chief minister to maharajas whose princely kingdoms were along the western shore of Gujarat. Gandhi, the youngest in his family, was expected to carry on, if not his father's position, at least his status of leadership. That hope sent Gandhi to London as a young man to be trained as a lawyer.

For Gandhi himself, the most demanding of the qualities of leadership was the severe moral rectitude of the model kings portrayed in the Epics and later Indian classical literature. Especially important to him was the figure of Harischandra portrayed in the *Markandeya Purana*. The story of this legendary king, which Gandhi saw enacted in his youth by wandering troupes of actors, was based on the king's absolute adherence to telling the truth. Gandhi applied himself to a most rigorous moral preparation, which he described in great detail in his autobiography entitled *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

The effective power of Gandhi's leadership was immense. The most striking example came in 1947, immediately after the partition and the independence of India and Pakistan had been declared. Rioting and killing began almost immediately. Significantly, Gandhi was not in New Delhi, the capital of India, at that time. He was in a village in Bengal, pleading with the people there not to be caught up in the rash wave of intercommunal violence which was sweeping across the Great Central Plain. Lord Montbatten, who was in New Delhi as the Governor General of India, wrote of Gandhi at that time: "In the Punjab we have fifty-five thousand soldiers and large scale rioting is on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man, and there is no rioting."⁸

It is noteworthy that in his political life Gandhi never held public office. When he was not in prison for his political activism (he spent a total of 2049 days there), he preferred to be in the villages rather than in any position of power. He considered himself the arbiter of political power rather than its wielder, its reformer rather than its manipulator. Yet he commanded great authority.

Both Gandhi and the people in the villages traced the immense authority which he did bring to public life to his commitment to dharma, the traditional moral quality of leadership. However, Gandhi disagreed with the people about the level of his moral achievement. They regarded him as a saint—the *Mahatma* or “great souled”—involved in politics, but he felt uncomfortable with their adulation. He saw himself as a politician trying to become a saint. He never stopped testing his moral strength to assure himself of his ability to lead his people to their freedom.

Gandhi was in these ways an embodiment of both the classical heritage of India and its struggle to become a modern nation. His quest for truth drew upon the tradition of Vedic sacrifice, his commitment to non-violence upon the Buddhist Dharma of Emperor Asoka, and his penchant for administrative order upon the Moghul dynasty of Akbar.

At the same time, Gandhi worked within the traditional structures of the village. Recognizing the importance of factions and the durability of jatis, he did not seek to destroy or undercut them; he sought to make them more effective as instruments of democracy. He retained the panchayat (council of five), a structure of jati governance, but broadened its function, making it an appropriate form for village government. He also made it more democratic by urging its conduct of public affairs by consensus.

It was once said of Gandhi, “Whenever Gandhi listened to his inner voice, he heard the clamor of the people.”⁹ This identification with his people was for Gandhi a religious obligation, his dharma. It was also his most important

contribution to modern democracy in India: He made both the revitalization of the tradition and structures of the village answerable to the will of the people.

Gandhi's uniqueness lies in the way he fused together the village, the classical, and the modern elements of India. Because he achieved an authentic national identity for himself, he became for the Indian people a symbol of their uniqueness and integrity among the nations of the modern world.

Gandhi did more than become a symbol of the national unity of the people of India. His struggle for their freedom, first in South Africa and then on the subcontinent itself, produced a new approach to international politics. This method of political action, which Gandhi called satyagraha, consists of active public confrontation initiated by an unyielding commitment to overcoming social injustice through non-violence. The highly principled and disciplined character of Gandhi's non-violent confrontations is fundamentally Indian. But such confrontations have become a symbol of unity against oppression throughout the world.

Psychoanalyst Dr. Erik Erikson portrayed Gandhi as an individual who developed a creative response to the crisis of man's maturity. That is the main thrust of his comprehensive study, *Gandhi's Truth*. He sees in Gandhi's achievement a hope for all of us:

To have faced mankind with nonviolence . . . marks the Mahatma's deed in 1919. In a period when proud statesmen could speak of a "war to end war"; when the superpolicemen of Versailles could bathe in the glory of a peace that would make "the world safe for democracy"; when the revolutionaries in Russia could entertain the belief that terror could initiate an eventual "withering away of the State"—during that same period, one man in India confronted the world with the strong suggestion that a new political instrument, endowed with a new kind of religious fervor, may yet provide man with a choice.¹⁰

Our study ends on this note of hope in the conviction that we still have much to learn about ourselves and about others who share this planet with us. We Americans, who have structured so much of our lives in terms of political and economic value, have much to learn of the symbolic meaning of life. We need a more comprehensive identity which can include the integrity of all of the diverse peoples within our own society. We need a symbol of our unity with other peoples on the earth.

The effectiveness of Gandhi's satyagraha as a method of non-violent political action in India's independence movement suggests an important alternative for us. It raises the possibility of our achieving social unity without the pall of conformity or the aggressiveness of competition and success.

It may be that out of our relationships with peoples who belong to other cultures, we may yet find a way to survive.



NOTES

(Chapter 1)

1. Information provided by the World Bank, GEO, vol. 4, May, 1982, p. 128.

(Chapter 3)

2. From the Sixth Rock Edict of Asoka, D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India*, London, 1965, p. 159. For a detailed description and translation of the Asokan Edicts, see Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, Oxford, 1961.

(Chapter 6)

3. M. Marriott, "Is Village Life Changing?" SPAN, vol. X, no. 7, July, 1969.

4. Personal correspondence from Larry Lifschultz, Bihar, India, December 1, 1969.

(Chapter 7)

5. *The Collected Poems and Plays of Rabindranath Tagore*, The Macmillan Company, 1937, p. 26.

(Chapter 9)

6. Dennis Dalton, "The Gandhian View of Caste," Mason (ed), *India and Ceylon, Unity and Diversity*, Oxford, 1967, p. 171.

7. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, Boston, 1957.

8. Geoffrey Ashe, *Gandhi*, New York, 1968, p. 375.

9. Louis Renou, *Hinduism*, New York, 1961.

10. Erik Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, New York, 1969, p. 391.

GLOSSARY

- Akbar** (1556-1605) The greatest of the Moghul emperors.
- Ashram** A religious community, like a monastery or a commune.
- Asoka** (268-232 B.C.) Mauryan emperor who used Buddhist Dharma as a standard for his rule.
- Bas-relief** A form of sculpture which projects figures from a flat surface.
- Brahman** Originally, the holy power of the Vedic sacrifice. Later, in the *Upanishads*, it came to mean the ultimate unity of all being.
- Brahmanas** Sacred texts of the Vedic period which describe how Vedic sacrifices are to be performed.
- Brahmin** The priestly community, ranked highest on the varna caste scale.
- Buddhism** A religious faith started in India by Siddhartha Gautama, who entered nirvana (i.e. died) in 483 B.C.
- Dharma** Translated: "law, justice, duty, cosmic order." The moral standard by which a society's and an individual's life is ordered and given meaning.
- Harappa** One of the two main cities (Mohenjo Daro is the other) in the Indus River Valley. It was excavated during the 1930s to reveal an ancient urban culture which began around 3000 B.C. and continued for over a thousand years.
- Islam** A religious faith started in Arabia during the seventh century by the Prophet Muhammad.
- Jain** A religious faith started in India by Mahavira in the sixth century B.C. Its primary teachings include the eternal transmigration of souls and the practice of non-violence toward all living creatures.

Jajmani A barter system of economic activity in the village, in which villagers provide their services on a regular basis to particular land owners—their patrons—in exchange for fixed portions of the annual harvest.

Jati An extended kinship group usually identified with a traditional occupation, which defines the perimeters of accepted marriage relationships. It is the unit which is ranked in the hierarchical social (caste) structure of a village and which moves within that structure.

Kshatriya The ruling and warrior caste, second in rank on the classical varna scale.

Lok Sabha Translated: “The House of the People.” The lower of the two houses of Parliament in the Republic of India.

Mahabharata The Great Epic of India, with over ninety thousand stanzas, composed around the third century B.C. It is the longest poem in the world. It is the story of five brothers’ struggle to wrest their father’s kingdom from their cousins.

Mahatma Literally: “Great Souled.” A title given to Gandhi by Rabindranath Tagore in 1921 and adopted by the people of India to express their belief in Gandhi’s saintliness.

Moghuls Islamic invaders of Turkish descent who established the longest dynastic imperial rule in the Great Central Plain of South Asia, from 1526 to 1857.

Muslim One who submits to the supreme will of Allah, as revealed to his Prophet Mohammad.

Nirvana Literally: “blowing out, extinguishing.” The ultimate enlightenment of Buddhism: departure from the relentless transmigratory cycle of births and deaths into nothingness.

Panchayat Literally: “council of five.” This traditional leadership of elders in the jati kinship group was adopted by the Panchayat Acts in the state legislatures during the 1950s as the appropriate form for democratically elected village government in the Republic of India.

Parsi A member of the Zoroastrian faith, the ancient religion of Persia. Most of the Parsis in South Asia live in Bombay and Karachi.

Punjab Translated: *panch* (five) and *ap* (water). Designates the land in the Great Central Plain through which the five rivers forming the Indus River system flow. The province of this name in the British Indian Empire was divided between India and Pakistan in 1947.

Purusha Translated: “man, person, spirit.” Used in the *Rig Veda* to designate the supreme being, the creator of the universe.

Raj Translated: “Rule” or “King.” Designates political sovereignty. (Our word “reign” comes from the same Indo-European root.) The word “raj” is used with “British” to identify the British colonial government of India; with “maha” (great) to identify the rulers of the Indian princely states; and with “swa” (self) to mean self-rule or independence. Swaraj also has the connotation of self-discipline, which is an important aspect of Gandhi’s concept of independence.

Ramayana The epic poem of Valmiki describing the ordeals of the ideal prince Rama. Most of the text describes his ultimately successful quest for his faithful wife Sita, who was abducted by the demonic King Ravana.

Rig Veda The earliest of the four Vedas, which are sacred to Hindus. It was compiled into an anthology of ten books containing 1028 hymns about 1000 B.C.

Salt March An act of non-violent civil disobedience (satyagraha) led by Gandhi in 1930. He marched from his ashram at Sabarmati 241 miles to Dandi on the coast to evaporate salt from the sea to protest the British tax on salt.

Sangha The community of all Buddhist monks.

Sanskrit Translated: “made together, formed, perfected.” The classical language of India.

Satyagraha Literally: “holding the truth.” The name Gandhi adopted while in South Africa to describe his non-violent civil protest against South African government oppression of the people from India. Gandhi’s translation of this term as “soul force” affirms that even early in his public career he understood such action to be primarily religious, and only secondarily political.

Shah Jahan (1627-1658) The fourth of the Moghul emperors

and grandson of Akbar. He built the Taj Mahal as a memorial to his wife Mumtaz Mahal, who died in childbirth in 1631.

Shaman An individual "possessed" by a supernatural spirit—similar to a medicine man in tribal societies.

Sikh A religious community founded in the Punjab by Guru Nanak during the sixteenth century. His teachings are contained in the sacred text *Adi Granth*. During the seventeenth century the community adopted the "five Ks" which identify Sikhs today: a comb, unshorn hair, sword, shorts, and steel bangle.

Siva Literally: "auspicious." The name of God in one of the two main sects of Hinduism: Shaivism (from Siva) and Vaishnavism ("followers of Vishnu").

Soma A hallucinogenic plant, probably a mushroom, used as a primary sacrificial element in the Vedic sacrifice and celebrated as a deity in the Vedic hymns.

Sudra Laborers, ranked fourth on the classical varna caste scale.

Sufi A person of the Islamic faith who affirms through religious discipline and mystical experience the spiritual union of self with God.

Tagore, Rabindranath (1861-1941) An outstanding Bengali poet and educator, whose collection of poems, *Gitanjali*, published in English translation in 1912, won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Upanishads Sacred sayings dating from around 500 B.C.; considered to be the final portion of the Vedas. They are discourses conducted by priests with their patrons, initiates, wives, or among themselves on the meaning of the Vedic sacrifice. The essential teaching of the *Upanishads* is the ultimate union of the transcendent self with Brahman, the power of the sacrifice understood as the source of the universe.

Vaisya The commercial or citizen strata of society, ranked third on the varna caste scale.

Varna Originally translated "class," later "color." The fourfold division of classical Indian society ranked on a purity-pollution scale: priests, rulers, citizens, and laborers. The untouchables and tribals are a fifth group, known as outcastes, ranked below the laborers.

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